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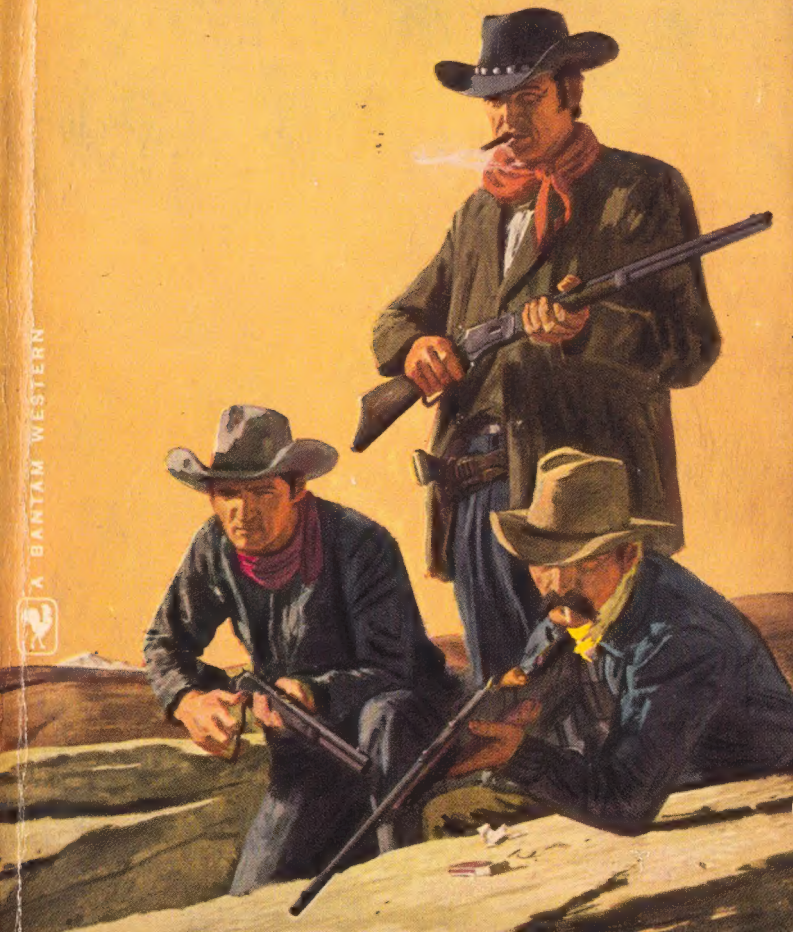
THE BUSHWHACKERS

FRANK GRUBER

THEY WERE THE TERROR OF THE BORDER—JUST ONE MAN HAD THE GUTS TO GO UP AGAINST THEM



A BANTAM WESTERN

THE BUSHWHACKERS

They were the scum of the Civil War guerrilla bands. For them the war would never be over. In the name of the South they raided and plundered among the border settlers, killing Union sympathizers, burning their houses, stealing their land. They rode by night, hid their faces, and shot from ambush.

The U. S. Army itself couldn't stamp them out. The border lawmen rode masked with them. So only Phil Bokker had the guts to take up his gun and stand against them.

BOOKS BY FRANK GRUBER

- PEACE MARSHAL
- OUTLAW
- GUNSIGHT
- BUFFALO BOX
- FIGHTING MAN
- BROKEN LANCE
- FORT STARVATION
- BITTER SAGE
- JOHNNY VENGEANCE
- BUGLES WEST
- THE BIG LAND
  (BUFFALO GRASS)
- LONESOME RIVER
- TALES OF WELLS FARGO
- TOWN TAMER
- THE MARSHAL

Published by Bantam Books

THE BUSHWHACKERS

BY FRANK GRUBER

BANTAM BOOKS NEW YORK

THIS LOW-PRICED BANTAM BOOK
printed in completely new type, especially designed for easy reading, contains the complete text of the original, hard-cover edition. NOT ONE WORD HAS BEEN OMITTED.

THE BUSHWHACKERS

A Bantam Book / published by arrangement with Rinehart and Company, Inc.

PRINTING HISTORY

Rinehart edition published January 1959
NEA syndicate serialization appeared beginning February 1960
Bantam edition published August 1960

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THE BUSHWHACKERS

ONE

Quantrell looked around the ring of faces—at the bloodshot eyes of Bloody Bill Anderson, the saliva-dripping mouth of George Todd, the icy blue eyes of the youngster, Frank James, at the impassive face of big Cole Younger.

"Well, gentlemen," Quantrell said, "I'll leave it up to you. It's not much of a fort, but a hundred Union soldiers can give us a rough time of it.

"A hundred Yanks—pah!" sneered Bloody Bill Anderson. "We'll lose some good men."

"I don't see that there's any argument," growled the savage George Todd. "We can't go back to Missouri and it's five hundred miles to Texas. We need the supplies."

"That's the only reason I'm even discussing the matter," agreed Quantrell. "We need the supplies."

"Then what're we waitin' for?" asked Cole Younger.

Wild Arch Clements turned from the edge of the clearing, trotted back to Quantrell and his group. "Reinforcements, Colonel!"

Quantrell and his lieutenants quickly moved to the edge of the trees. The unfinished fort—merely an earthen breastwork, five feet high—was two hundred yards to the west and south. A half mile away, approaching the fort from the north, was a strung-out detachment: thirty or forty blue-clad soldiers; two ambulances containing musicians, whose gleaming instruments were bared to the sun; and another ambulance containing two civilians and an officer.

"General Blunt!" exclaimed Quantrell. "I heard he was on his way here to take command."

"A general!" yipped Bloody Bill Anderson. "I ain't never killed me a general."

"You won't kill *this* one," snapped Quantrell. "We'll take him prisoner. With a general to dicker for . . ."

"Let's go!" howled George Todd, vaulting into the saddle of his horse.

"A general!" cried Arch Clements. "Let's capture us a general!"

A wild yell went up among the guerrillas, and there was a swift, reckless forward movement. Quantrell shouted for order, but was unheard. Still afoot, he was knocked aside as the guerrilla command swarmed out of the woods that had sheltered them and into the clearing.

In front of the earthen fort, in a double rank, stood some forty Union soldiers, ready to salute their new commanding officer as he approached. At sight of the two hundred-odd guerillas headed for them, the soldiers broke and rushed for the protection of the earthen walls.

The guerrillas instinctively swerved away from the fort, to drive a wedge between it and the approaching detachment. They rode wildly, without formation, but every man was armed with a minimum of two Navy Colts. They rode with the reins between their teeth, a revolver in each hand.

General Blunt saw them coming. He stood up in his ambulance, began issuing commands, none of which were heard by his bodyguard. Blunt was new in Kansas; his men were veterans. They had fought Quantrell before—and they were alive because they had fled from him.

They fled now. They dispersed in all directions, some taking off for the open prairie, some galloping back toward the north, a desperate few riding furiously for the protection of the earthwork. Only a half-dozen men stood to fight it out. They died.

The members of the band were encumbered by their instruments. Bullets began banging on brass horns, cut through drums and smashed fifes.

A horse went down and his team mates began to plunge and rear, upsetting one ambulance. The bandsmen were spilled to the ground and were quickly dispatched by the guerrillas now wheeling and whirling, yelling and screaming, fighting and firing.

Thirty bandsmen died, as did five Union cavalrymen. General Blunt somehow got through the milling guerrillas and, under cover of a hot protecting fire from the breastwork, reached the confines of the new fort.

The guerrillas, just out of effective carbine range from the fort, began to plunder the dead soldiers and bandsmen. Bloody Bill Anderson kicked a dying man in the face, stooped and picked up a large portfolio that lay on the ground. He tore it open, stared at what he saw and gestured to Quantrell.

"Charley, look at this!"

Quantrell rode over and took a rectangular piece of pasteboard from Anderson's hand.

His eyes narrowed. "It's a picture . . ."

"Lawrence! In front of the Eldridge House. That's me, there. . . ." Anderson pointed at one of the figures in the sketch.

Quantrell nodded. "A very good likeness, Bill. Although I can't say the same for this one of me."

"Looks just like you," chuckled Anderson wickedly. "And if I remember right, this happened just about like he's got it here." He looked sharply at Quantrell. "You think he was there?"

With the toe of his boot, Quantrell turned the dying man half over. He looked thoughtfully at the pain-distorted face. Slowly he shook his head. "If he was, he was hiding," Quantrell said. He stooped, reached inside the man's coat and took out a leather wallet. He opened it and skimmed through some papers and cards, finally stopping to read one: "JOHN HOVEY, *Fred Cowan's Illustrated Weekly.*"

"A newspaperman!"

"A very good one, too," said Quantrell. "I've seen his sketches and battle reports in Cowan's paper."

"Well, this is one picture you won't see in it," growled Bloody Bill Anderson reaching for the sketch in Quantrell's hand.

Quantrell drew back. "No," he said sardonically. "It's the least we can do for Mr. Hovey." He looked down at the dying man. "He didn't get a chance to mail it to the paper, so I think we ought to mail it for him."

Anderson stared at Quantrell, then began to chuckle. "All right, Charley; let's mail it to the paper. They can print it —after he's dead."

Carelessly he pointed one of his Navy Colts at the head of the dying John Hovey. He pulled the trigger.

TWO

It gets warm in Missouri river-bottom lands and sometimes after a good rain, or before it, the humidity rises into the nineties. On such days only the Negroes could toil in the fields, but the Negroes now were free, so they did not do much field work in mid-July. It wasn't necessary, when a good strong buck could pick up an easy fifty cents, or even a dollar, for a few hours of light work in one of the villages or hamlets.

Not more than four blacks were on the street of Raytown as Bokker stepped down from the stage in front of the express office. The agent remained inside, and since there were no other passengers, either coming or going, the stage pulled off, leaving Bokker on the wooden sidewalk with his valise.

He signaled to a Negro loitering in front of a nearby store. The man shuffled over. "I'm looking for a man named Grayson," Bokker said. "Bill Grayson. Do you know where he lives?"

"Yassuh," was the reply.

Bokker waited for the details and when they did not come, said gently, "Where?"

The man pointed down the street. "You goes right down this here road, to the first turn, 'bout a half mile. You go along the turn mebbe a mile, mebbe mile and a half. That's Cap'n Grayson's place. Spick-'n'-span, bran'-new white house."

"I can hire a rig?"

"Spec so. Mistah Lamon, what runs the hotel, has some car'idges."

"Thank you, Sambo," said Bokker. He picked up his carpetbag.

The Negro let him take a half-dozen steps before he said, "Tha's where he lives, like I told you, but if it's the Cap'n you want to see, he ain't there."

Bokker turned. "Where is he?"

The Negro pointed to a building across the street, a rather large two-story frame building, newly painted. It had a big sign across the veranda: *Raytown Hotel-Bar.*

"You find him in the bar."

Bokker did not bother to thank the Negro a second time. He crossed the street and climbed a short flight of steps to the lobby of the hotel. It was cooler inside, and off to the left, the bar, darkened, was even cooler.

A colorless man of about forty was leaning over the hotel desk, reading a newspaper. He looked up as Bokker entered.

"Afternoon, Stranger. Room?"

"Later." Bokker set his carpetbag valise on the floor near the desk. "A cold beer first, I think."

"Coldest this side of Westport. Yes, sir!"

Bokker went into the room at the left. It contained a fairly long bar, four or five tables and a good dozen patrons, some of whom were cool enough to wear their coats.

Bokker stepped up to the bar. "A big, cold beer," he said, "then a short one, right away."

The bartender, without comment, drew a large, foaming glass of beer and set it down before Bokker. As he quaffed the refreshing fluid, the bartender set a smaller glass of beer before him.

Bokker drained the large glass and exhaled contentedly. Then he picked up the short glass and looked around. Bill Grayson, one of those wearing a linen coat, sat at a table nearby, with a friend who was drinking beer. Grayson had a whiskey glass before him.

Bokker carried his small beer to Grayson's table. "Captain Grayson?" he inquired.

Grayson was about thirty, a relaxed, dispirited-looking man. He had long mustaches, but had not shaved in three or four days. He said, "Pull up a chair."

Bokker seated himself and addressed his attention to Grayson. "Have you ever seen me before?"

A flicker of interest showed for a moment in Grayson's eyes, then faded. "It's possible, sir. I have a poor memory for names. Unfortunate."

"It's Bokker, Captain Grayson, Phil Bokker. B-o-k-k-e-r."

"I'm afraid it doesn't ring a bell. Should it?"

"I thought perhaps it might."

"You're a commercial man, a—a drummer?"

"No, but I'd like to show you something. If you'll excuse me a moment."

Bokker rose and, setting his short beer on the table, left the bar. He returned to the lobby, found his carpetbag valise

where he had left it. Stooping, he opened the bag and took out a large magazine.

The hotel man watched him without any show of curiosity. Bokker re-entered the bar and found Captain Grayson now alone at a table. His former companion had moved to a table some dozen feet away, where he sat huddled over his glass of beer, seeking to find in its amber color some chord of memory, or . . . clue to life. He seemed indifferent to his surroundings, but Bokker had an idea that a sharply raised voice at Grayson's table would rouse him very easily.

Bokker sat down. He extended the magazine to Captain Grayson and picked up his beer.

Grayson glanced at the magazine and began to leaf idly through it. "*Fred Cowan's Illustrated Weekly*," he observed casually.

"Page eleven . . ."

Grayson's eyes flickered to Bokker. He leafed past page eleven, to page fifteen.

"You passed it," Bokker reminded him. "Page eleven."

Grayson turned back. "This picture?"

"Yes."

Grayson surveyed the picture and made just the right, although delayed, exclamation. "I say, this is about Quantrell!"

The type across the top of the full-page illustration read: "*Quantrell's Bloody Raid at Lawrence.*"

It showed a guerrilla dragging a civilian by the heels into the dusty street of Lawrence, where Quantrell sat astride a great horse, passing judgment upon the victims. Two men stood beside the guerrilla chieftain, each with a sheet of paper in his hands. The face of the youth who was dragging the victim by the heels was wildly distorted, as were the faces of two other young guerrillas in the background, who were clubbing down another citizen of Lawrence with the muzzles of Navy pistols. Another was pulling his horse to its haunches, having apparently just ridden into the scene.

The clearest of all the faces in the picture, however, was that of the man who was thrusting a blazing revolver into the face of the citizen being dragged before Quantrell. At the distance the man's revolver could not miss, and it could be safely assumed that the man he was firing at died with a bullet in his brain.

There was a fairly long caption under the full-page sketch.

It gave names of some of the principals in the scene of carnage and massacre. A box, made by routing out a square of the lower right-hand corner of the picture and filling it with black type, read:

> This is the most astonishing picture of the year. It was drawn at the scene of battle by the noted illustrator-correspondent, John Hovey, and mailed to us AFTER HIS DEATH. Quantrell is the central figure in the portrait. It is reported that Quantrell murdered Hovey with his own hand at the Baxter Springs Massacre and with macabre humor mailed the illustration to us.

Bokker said, "You've seen the picture before?"

Grayson looked up from the magazine. "Can't say that I have."

"Weren't you at Baxter Springs?"

Grayson regarded Bokker mildly. "Whatever gave you that idea?"

Bokker exhaled with a touch of weariness. "You didn't ride with Quantrell?"

"Mr. Booker," Grayson said, "I served in the Confederate Army. Under General Jo Shelby, I'm proud to say. I also rode with him into Mexico and enlisted with Maximilian. I'm not ashamed of my war record. You, sir, you wore gray?"

"Look at the picture again," Bokker said gently.

Grayson picked up the magazine again, but glanced at the illustration only briefly. "This is a Yankee magazine."

Bokker decided to try a new line. "The war's been over for quite a while. There aren't any Yanks now, or any Johnny Rebs. Just Americans."

"The hell you say!"

Bokker sighed and picked up the magazine. "You don't recognize the portrait of yourself in this?"

"Me?"

"Third from the left—the caption says, 'Captain Bill Grayson.' "

"We covered a lot of ground," Grayson said easily, "but I don't recall that the Iron Brigade ever took a town named Lawrence. Not in Kansas."

"All right," said Bokker. "I won't press it."

"Never talk politics. Not my business." Grayson nodded carelessly toward the man at the other table, who had been with him when Bokker first sat down. "Lige's job."

The man named Lige couldn't have heard Grayson's soft-spoken words, but he had seen the nod in his direction. He got up and came over.

"Lige," Grayson went on, "this is Mr. Booker."

"Bokker," corrected Bokker. "B-o-k-k-e-r."

"Bokker," said Grayson. "Lige Thomas. He's our sheriff."

"Hoddo," nodded the sheriff. "Figuring to stay in Raytown very long?"

"Any objections?"

"No law against it. Only we had our share of trouble here during the war and we like things nice and quiet. Peaceful. Don't like trouble."

"There'll be no trouble from me."

" 'Course not. We don't go lookin' for trouble and we don't like people comin' lookin' for it."

Bokker got up, rolled up the magazine and, nodding to the sheriff and Bill Grayson, walked out of the bar. In the lobby he stepped up to the desk.

"I'd like to register now," he said to the relaxed man behind the desk.

"Dollar too much?"

Bokker took a dollar from his pocket and plunked it on the desk. The hotel man turned a register around and handed Bokker a quill pen.

The date on the left-hand page was two days old and contained only a single name.

Bokker wrote on the right-hand page: "Philip Bokker, Beaver Dam, Wisconsin."

"Number three," said the hotel man, "upstairs, first room to your right."

"Key?"

The man behind the desk frowned. "There's a hook on the inside of the door. Guess there's a key around here somewhere, but I ain't seen it for quite a spell."

"The hook'll do," said Bokker.

He picked up his bag and climbed the stairs to the second floor. The door of Room 3 was open and he went in. Closing the door, he tried the hook and found it rather loose, but he hooked it anyway. He took off his coat and hung it on a nail in the wall, then sat down on the small cot and opened the copy of *Fred Cowan's Illustrated Weekly*.

He turned to page eleven and for the thousandth time studied the last work of the late John Hovey. There was no

question, of course. It was six years since Hovey had drawn his sketch and Bill Grayson had aged somewhat, but it was still Grayson who stood at Quantrell's left; Grayson wearing the butternut homemade tunic with the large patch pockets that had been the unofficial uniform of Quantrell's raiders.

Bokker's eyes went to the face of the guerrilla who was in the act of shooting off his Navy pistol into the face of the civilian being dragged toward Quantrell.

There was a touch of wildness in the young guerrilla's face, yet . . . it was the face of Phil Bokker.

But Phil Bokker had not been at Lawrence, Kansas, with Quantrell.

Phil Bokker had worn a blue uniform throughout the war.

THREE

Bokker took a nap and when he awakened it was dark in his little room. He remembered having seen a candle and, striking a match, found it on the washstand, which contained a pitcher and a bowl of tepid water. He lit the candle, washed his hands and face and then went down to the hotel lobby.

Things were livening up in the barroom, but Bokker gave the room only a glance. He went outside and, standing on the raised wooden sidewalk, looked up and down the street, which consisted of less than two blocks of buildings.

His eyes finally focused on a restaurant across the street. It bore the sign: *Anne's Place—Eats.* He crossed the street and entered the restaurant. It contained a short counter and two tables. The only other customer was a whiskered oldster who sat at the far end of the counter, sipping a noisy bowl of soup.

Anne Moody, a fresh-faced woman in her late twenties, came out of the kitchen and set a glass of water before Bokker. "Would you like steak or chops, Mr. Bokker? Pork chops."

"You know my name?"

"Lige Thomas gets his meals here."

"I see. Mmm—how about the pork chops?"

She nodded and went into the kitchen. She put the chops on the fire and then returned. "I'd like to see that magazine, Mr. Bokker," she said.

Bokker regarded her curiously. "Captain Grayson didn't care about looking at it."

"Of course not. He wants to forget." Anne frowned a little. "My husband, Dick Moody, was with Quantrell."

"At Lawrence?"

"At Lawrence."

"I'd like to talk to him."

She shook her head impassively. "The bluecoats hanged him in September 'sixty-three."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"He was stubborn. When General Ewing put out Order

Number Eleven, he said he'd be damned if he'd leave. So they came out and burned our house. He—he killed two bluecoats before they got him." She paused. "You won't get much information in Raytown. Not from the menfolks."

"The war's been over four years. They all received amnesty."

"You don't forget in four years. . . . Excuse me, I've got to turn the pork chops."

She hastened into the kitchen, but did not return again until she brought out a platter containing two pork chops, potatoes and bread. The oldster, meanwhile, finished ladling his soup into his mouth, put a nickel on the counter and left. Bokker was the only customer when Anne brought him his food.

He said, "This was guerrilla territory during the war. I imagine quite a few of the men rode with Quantrell."

"Mr. Bokker," Anne said seriously, "what's your business?"

"I'm a farmer."

"You don't look like a farmer."

"I'm a farmer on Saturdays and Sundays. The rest of the week I'm a lawyer."

"A lawyer!" She showed concern. "What—what are you looking for in Raytown?"

Bokker looked toward the kitchen door, then turned an inquiring face to Anne. She hesitated, then nodded.

Bokker said, casually, "I'm handling an estate. It's rather complicated and I need someone who can identify a man who was killed at Lawrence during Quantrell's raid."

"An Abolitionist?"

"That word died a few years ago."

"A lot of Raytown people died during the war, more than half the menfolks and some women and children. We—the people here aren't ready to talk to Abol—to Union people."

Bokker nodded thoughtfully. "I got the same idea from the sheriff."

"Lige was trying to warn you."

The frown came again to Anne's forehead and after hesitating a moment, she went back into the kitchen. Bokker began eating.

Anne remained in the kitchen until he finished eating. As he rose from his stool, she re-entered the restaurant.

"An excellent supper," Bokker said. "How much do I owe you?"

"Fifty cents."

"That's not very much."

"I only charge forty cents to Raytown people. The fifty cents is for drummers and—and strangers."

Bokker put a half dollar on the counter. "I'll see you at breakfast time."

He left the restaurant and recrossed to the hotel. Someone was singing in the bar and Bokker stopped, of half a mind to go in and have a beer. He finally decided against it and climbed to the second floor. He struck a match to find his way to the door of Room 3, but it went out as he opened the door.

A voice inside the room said quietly, "Don't strike another match!"

It was a woman's voice. A chink of light came from the window, revealing a figure standing at the far side of the room.

Bokker stepped into the room and closed the door. "All right if I sit down?" he asked.

"Sit!"

Bokker groped and found the bed. He seated himself on it, letting his hand search beside the bed for his valise. It had been moved and he suspected that the woman—or girl—had ransacked it and probably held the Navy gun she had found in it.

She did not move from near the window, and Bokker could not distinguish her features. He could not even tell if she was young or old, pretty or ugly. He could, however, make out her form. It was slender.

She said, low, "Please don't talk loud. The walls are thin."

"All right," Bokker agreed. "What do you want to talk about?"

"The picture in the magazine. I've seen it."

"When?"

There was a trace of hesitation. "We—we have one. But I looked at yours a few minutes ago."

"Were you in the restaurant a little while ago?"

"Anne's place? No. . . . Why?"

"I had an idea Anne had someone out in the kitchen."

"Lige Thomas, probably. He and Anne are going to get married." The woman paused. "Did Anne question you?"

"A little."

"What did you tell her?"

"That I was a lawyer handling an inheritance case."

"Who? I mean, what's the name of the person whose case you're handling?"

"Bokker. Phil Bokker."

"That's you!"

Bokker shrugged and thought then that it was a useless gesture, since the woman couldn't see it anyway. He said, "I gave you my name."

"It's your own case you're handling?"

"No—no, I said that I *told* Anne Moody I was handling an inheritance case."

"It's not true?"

Bokker said quietly, "You're here because you want to tell me something, or you want to ask me some questions. Which is it?"

"Some questions first. *Why* are you here?"

"I came to see Bill Grayson."

"Why?"

"His picture's in the magazine—*Fred Cowan's Illustrated Weekly*."

"All right," said the woman by the window, "your own picture is in it."

"That," said Bokker, "is what I'm trying to run down. Why my picture was drawn showing me killing a man in Lawrence, Kansas, when I wasn't in Lawrence, Kansas."

"Can you prove you weren't?"

Bokker hesitated. "I can if Bill Grayson will talk."

"He'll talk."

"He wouldn't this afternoon."

"He won't talk to you directly. But—what did you want to know from him?"

"I want him to say I wasn't at Lawrence."

"All right, you weren't."

"You say so, but Grayson hasn't said so."

"He's saying so now."

"You're talking for him?"

"I'm his sister."

"He sent you here?"

"Let's put it this way. I know everything he knows and I can tell you what you want to know. I *think* I can."

"You know the picture? You've studied it?"

"I know it by heart."

"Quantrell's in the picture. He's dead. Bloody Bill Anderson is dead. So is George Todd."

"Arch Clements is dead, too."

"Who's still alive?"

"Fletcher Trow is in the picture. So is MacDonald Pierson. And Max Hildebrand."

Bokker repeated the names to remember them. "Fletcher Trow, MacDonald Pierson and Max Hildebrand. Your brother identified them?"

She did not answer that question, but countered with one of her own. "You weren't there, but you're in the picture—why?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out from Bill Grayson."

She was silent for a moment. Then: "He won't talk. You found that out this afternoon. You can't blame him. The Union Army's still running things around here."

"I haven't seen any bluecoats in Raytown."

"They're in Kansas City, and Kansas City isn't very far from here."

"The army's not bothering anyone."

"For the moment. But we've had our share of the Union Army. We don't want to stir up anything."

"I'm not trying to stir up anything," Bokker said seriously. "I just want to clear myself of a crime I didn't commit. I wasn't at Lawrence, Kansas, and I didn't ride with Quantrell. Not then, or any other time." He paused. "Was your brother with Quantrell at Baxter Springs?"

She did not reply for a moment; then, when she spoke, her tone was cautious. "Is that—where the artist who drew the picture was killed?"

"Yes."

"Bill wasn't there."

"You're sure?"

"He quit after Lawrence. So did a lot of others."

"What about Fletcher Trow? MacDonald Pierson? Max Hildebrand?"

"I don't know."

"You said you could tell me anything your brother could."

"Within reason."

"Can't I meet your brother somewhere?"

She exclaimed quickly, "No! Don't—don't try that. It'll make trouble. And it wouldn't be safe—for you."

Bokker drew a match from his pocket and reached to the floor to strike it. Apparently she could make out in the less than total darkness that he was stooping over.

She cried out and made a rush toward him. "Don't!"

He was starting to strike the match as her body hit his. There was a tiny flicker or flame on the floor, but it did Bokker no good. She was a bundle of fury, striking at him, kicking, fighting. Surprised by the savageness of her attack, Bokker was forced to defend himself. He caught an arm, but it was jerked free and her other hand raked his face. He caught that hand and she struck him with the freed hand. Her sharp, bony shoulder hit him in the chest; her knee almost drove the breath from him as it went into his stomach.

The tiny flame on the floor was out then and Bokker saw nothing of her face. For just a moment he won out over her, as his arms enveloped her. He felt her heart beating wildly, was aware that a tremor ran through her and then she was out of his grasp like a weasel, all sinew and muscle, without much bone.

Bokker lunged for her in the darkness, missed, then leaped to his feet and moved for the door. He was too late. She had whisked it open, was darting out.

Bokker followed. But only into the hall. Her flying feet were pounding the far end of the long narrow corridor. A door was whipped open and she was out, descending a flight of stairs into the darkness behind the hotel. Bokker knew that it would be a waste of time to go after her. She probably knew every nook and cranny of Raytown, and he was a stranger.

Besides, what good would it do to find her? She would tell him what she wanted to tell him and nothing more. He could not force her to talk . . . as he might be able to force Bill Grayson.

FOUR

He stood in the darkened hall a moment, then, drawing a deep breath, descended to the hotel lobby. The hotel man sat behind the desk, paring his fingernails. He nodded to Bokker as the latter crossed to the barroom.

The place was doing a thriving business. Several card games were in progress and a half-dozen men stood at the bar. Two or three wore wrinkled white suits and had mint juleps before them.

Bill Grayson stood at the bar, in a little group of three, which included Lige Thomas and a heavy-set man of about twenty-five.

There was a small clear space at the bar, and Bokker moved toward it, but before he reached it the big man spread himself and covered most of the available room.

"Excuse me," said Bokker. He tried to move into the space, but neither the heavy-set man nor his neighbor budged an inch. Bokker signaled to the bartender.

"Beer."

The bartender shot a quick look at Bill Grayson, hesitated, then drew the glass of beer. There was a frown on his face as he set the glass on the bar. Bokker waited for his beer at the edge of the little group. When the glass was set on the bar, he said, "Excuse me," and shouldered the big man aside.

The man turned slowly. "You crowded me, Mister."

"I said excuse me!" replied Bokker coolly.

"Shovin' a man and sayin' excuse me ain't right," growled the heavy-set man.

Bokker swallowed his beer and looked at the other man over the rim of the beer glass. He lowered the half-emptied glass.

He said to Bill Grayson, "He's going to do your fighting?"

Grayson had the grace to wince. "Don't know what you mean."

Bokker appealed to Lige Thomas. "What about it, Sheriff?"

"I warned you this afternoon, Bokker," snapped the sheriff. "We don't like strangers coming here, looking for trouble."

"I'm not the one making the trouble."

The big man was waiting for his cue. Lige Thomas gave it to him. He said, "I don't wear my badge when I'm having a little refreshment with my friends."

"My name," said the big man, "is Charr Mechem. I ain't ever been licked."

Bokker nodded. "And you rode with Quantrell?"

A sudden hush fell upon the men in the vicinity of the bar. Only in the background, at the far side of the room, was there still a hum of conversation.

Mechem's tongue came out, moistened his lips. His meaty hands reached out.

Bokker dashed the dregs of his beer into the big man's face, tossed the glass to the bar and smashed Mechem in the face. It was a hard blow that sent a shock up Bokker's arm, all the way to his shoulder. It barely caused Mechem to falter and Bokker knew then that this fight would be an ordeal.

He gave way before the big man, who outweighed him by at least thirty pounds. Mechem crowded in, swinging mightily. Bokker ducked, stepped back. A hand hit the small of his back, shoved him violently forward into Mechem's flailing fist.

The blow caught Bokker high on the left cheekbone, dropped him to his knees. A roaring filled his ears, but above it he heard Charr Mechem grate, "Get up!"

Bokker climbed wobblingly to his feet and was promptly knocked down again. He rose only halfway, then threw himself forward into a tight clinch. Mechem heaved and swung from right to left to throw Bokker aside, but Bokker clung for dear life, while his head cleared. A rabbit punch clubbed the back of Bokker's head.

He gave way, striking at Mechem's face with his fist even as he broke. Mechem was hurt and let out a roar. He charged in, muttering curses, and Bokker hit him on the mouth and a smashing blow on the big man's throat that sent Mechem back, gasping and choking.

Bokker stormed in. He hit the big man in the stomach with everything he had and, as Mechem folded forward, brought an uppercut from his knees. Mechem reeled back

on his heels, tottered, and Bokker hit him again. Mechem crashed to the floor on his back, rolled over and struggled to get to his knees.

Bokker made his great mistake then. He waited for his opponent to rise and a blow struck the back of his head and knocked him sprawling on top of Mechem. Both men struggled to clear themselves and Mechem made it to his feet first.

As Bokker got up, Mechem's fist smashed him down again. He got up a second time and Mechem's boot kicked him a savage blow on the forehead. Bokker went out.

He lay sprawled on his back, struggling for consciousness. Grayson called for a tall glass of cold beer and when the bartender gave it to him, stooped and dumped it over Bokker's face. It washed away blood and revived Bokker. He continued to lie on the floor, however.

Lige Thomas said, "I told you not to start trouble."

He stooped, grabbed a handful of Bokker's coat front, yanked him up to his feet and held him until he could recover. He said, then, "The Kansas City stage leaves in an hour. Be on it."

Bokker could not fight Mechem, Grayson, Lige Thomas and a half-dozen other former guerrillas who were probably in the bar of the Raytown Hotel. He walked, a bit unsteadily, out of the place, through the lobby and up to the second floor. He struck a match, found his room and lit a second match. Bill Grayson's sister had moved the candlestick to the floor near the window, but he found it with the third match.

He closed the door of his room, located his valise, also near the window, and went through it. The girl had rummaged in it, but its contents were intact. He examined the Navy gun, found that the loads had not been tampered with and put it back in the valise.

He took off his coat and washed his battered face, dabbing tenderly at two severe bruises. Finally, he put his coat on and, carrying the valise, walked down to the lobby.

Lige Thomas was loitering near the front door, so Bokker assumed that it was not necessary to notify the hotel man that he was checking out.

There was a light in the express and stage office, and Bokker found the agent preparing some parcels to be shipped out on the stage.

For a dollar, Bokker bought a ticket to Kansas City, Kansas, and waited inside the station until the stagecoach arrived. There was one passenger aboard the stage, a middle-aged drummer, who was dozing fitfully in the seat facing forward. Bokker noted that Lige Thomas was outside the stage office.

Bokker seated himself opposite the sleeping drummer, his valise on the seat beside him. The driver cracked his whip and the coach rolled away. The drummer awakened for an instant, regarded Bokker through slitted eyes, then resumed his heavy breathing.

The lights of Raytown receded as the stagecoach bounced along a rutted road on the last lap of its journey to Kansas City.

A mile out of Raytown the speed of the coach decreased for a moment as it took a sharp turn. It was then that Bokker opened the door and stepped out into darkness, gripping his valise tightly in both hands. He hit the ground, made a violent somersault and landed on a patch of sweet-smelling clover. He lay still.

The driver of the coach was apparently heedless of the loss of a passenger; at any rate the coach noise progressed evenly and after a few minutes became faint in the distance. Bokker picked himself up. In the darkness he opened his valise and took out his Navy gun. He thrust it under the waistband of his trousers and looked back toward the dim lights of Raytown. As nearly as he could estimate it was around midnight.

The moon was three-quarters full, but somewhat obscured by hazy clouds. Yet it was light enough to distinguish shadows and Bokker set out across a field. He climbed a pole fence, walked through a meadow in which the lush grass was almost to his knees and then cut across a shallow ravine and came out in a stubbled wheat field. He was about parallel now to the village of Raytown, although a quarter mile or more to the west of it. A dog barked off to his left and Bokker veered to the right.

He went another quarter mile and then started obliquely to the left. A half hour of patient trudging over a couple of fields and through a patch of brush brought him out upon a well-traveled road.

He went down the road a short distance and came to a crossroad. He took the right fork. A house loomed up on the right, but it was dark. Its dogs, however, were wide awake and

they set up a furious barking. Fortunately for Bokker the dogs were inside the yard fence which apparently was tight enough to contain them. He went on down the road, passed a heavy patch of woods and then came again to open fields. He estimated that he had traveled a mile or more down the side road, and stopped.

He thought for a moment that he saw a faint light up the road on the right, but it disappeared and did not come on again. He moved forward again, walking carefully in the dusty right rut of the road. After a few minutes he saw a cluster of large shadows on the right and knew that he was approaching the home of Bill Grayson.

Then, suddenly, Bokker heard a sound on the road behind him, the clop-clopping of horses' hoofs. In a panic he leaped to the cover of a bush at the side of the road.

The horses came closer. As did voices.

One of the voices said, ". . . . I don't know. I've thought about it until my head's been ready to burst and I can't remember. There were too many other things to think about at the time. Just keeping alive."

"I know," said the second voice. "None of us knew how it would come out. I, for one, never figured I'd live this long. The things we did . . ."

"We were all crazy," said the first voice, "and the worst one of all was Charley Quantrell. Because he had some old scores to pay, we did things that still cause me to have bad dreams. Damn that Bokker for coming around!"

That was the voice of Bill Grayson. The other voice, which Bokker had not heard before, said, "It could have been Charley who doctored up the picture. He was a schoolteacher, you know . . ."

"He couldn't draw," replied Grayson. "I don't know about Bloody Bill, but it wasn't his way. He went right into a thing, settled it with the gun or knife. That's why he and George were able to win out . . ."

That was as much as Bokker heard. The horses were past him, and a dog at the house ahead suddenly began barking. He was promptly joined by a half-dozen other dogs and they set up a fearful racket.

A light went on in the house.

FIVE

Bokker came out from behind the bush and stood in the middle of the road. He was still standing there, when a revolver cracked and all hell broke loose at the house of Bill Grayson. A man's scream split the night air, another gun banged and another. The dogs went into a veritable frenzy of barking.

Bokker was tearing the Navy gun from his waistband as the horse came galloping toward him. He took a step or two to the right, cried out, "Hold it!"

Flame and thunder lanced at Bokker. A bullet tore through his coat sleeve and he thrust out his Navy gun and fired. The horse coming directly at him and suddenly riderless.

The animal shied away from Bokker, cut across a field on the left of the road. Bokker, running forward, skidded to an abrupt halt. Another horse was galloping down the road, away from Bokker and Grayson's house.

A woman's voice cried out near Grayson's house.

Bokker searched the road for the man at whom he had fired. He saw him lying in a huddle, moved cautiously toward him.

"I've got you covered," he said carefully.

The figure on the ground did not move, made no response. Bokker stepped up to him, got down on one knee. Dark as it was, Bokker knew that the man would not move again.

He got to his feet and went forward. The woman was still calling to the dogs, quieting them. When the racket finally died out, Bokker walked into the pale light cast by the light inside the house. He saw Bill Grayson lying on the ground and the woman came toward him, a carbine in her hands.

"Throw up your hands, you murderer!" she spat at him.

"Wait a minute," Bokker exclaimed. "It wasn't me . . ."

"Up!"

The frightened voice of a Negro called from the house. "Y-you need me, Miz Grayson?"

"Yes," replied the woman grimly over her shoulder. She

moved forward, thrust the muzzle of the carbine within a foot of Bokker's stomach. "Drop that gun!"

Bokker let his Navy gun clatter to the ground. "You're making a mistake," he protested. "I came here to talk to Captain Grayson. It wasn't me who shot him."

"You can tell that to the sheriff! Mose, tell Donny to ride into town and fetch out Sheriff Thomas, then find a rope and come back here."

Five minutes later, his hands tied tightly behind his back, Bokker was herded into the house by a giant Negro and the woman, who still kept him covered with a rifle: the newly widowed Mrs. Grayson.

She was young, not more than twenty-two or three, a fine-looking woman with hair the color of dark taffy. She was wearing a long robe over her underclothes, but in spite of the loose robe, Bokker could make out her figure. It was excellent.

She gestured with the gun to a chair. Bokker hesitated, then seated himself awkwardly. "You're making a mistake," he said. "I didn't shoot Captain Grayson."

Mose, who had taken possession of Bokker's Navy gun, sniffed at the muzzle. "Gun fired," he said laconically.

"I fired at the man who was with Captain Grayson," Bokker declared. "He came at me—shooting."

"I'd prefer you didn't talk until the sheriff got here," Mrs. Grayson said.

"I want to ask you just one question—where's Captain Grayson's sister?"

Mrs. Grayson regarded Bokker carelessly for a moment, then her eyes narrowed. "Bill has—had—no sister."

Bokker nodded. "Then it was you who came to my hotel room this evening!"

Mrs. Grayson inhaled sharply. "Do you know what you're saying?" She took a sudden step toward him, her hand drawn back to slap him. Then she caught herself.

"I forgot—you're a Yankee."

"How do you know I am?"

Her mouth set in firm lines. "I'm talking no more."

Lige Thomas entered the Grayson kitchen twenty minutes later. Charr Mechem and another man were with him, and Bokker could hear several more outside.

Lige Thomas came up to where Bokker sat in the kitchen chair, his hands behind him. "So you got off the stage!"

"Obviously."

Charr Mechem licked his lips. "You'd think he'd had enough."

His right fist flicked out and crashed against Bokker's jaw, knocking him and the chair to the floor. Bokker struggled up to his knees, licked away a trickle of blood that seeped from the corner of his mouth. Mechem stepped forward to smash Bokker again, but the sheriff gestured him back. "He's got to talk, Charr."

Bokker got to his feet. "It's easy enough to hit a man when his hands are tied."

"I can lick you any day of the week," growled Charr Mechem, "an' twice on Sunday."

Lige Thomas said, "You got a rough tongue, Bokker. Now, let's hear you use it to talk yourself out of this."

Bokker said, "I wanted to ask Captain Grayson some questions."

"You asked him enough in Raytown."

"I didn't get any answers."

Thomas scowled. "You figured you might do better with a gun in your fist?"

"I thought he might talk away from his friends."

"So now you got a murder against you."

"I didn't kill Grayson."

The sheriff turned to Mrs. Grayson. "You caught him with a gun in his hand?"

There was a slight hesitation before she answered. "Yes."

"There was a man with Captain Grayson," Bokker said doggedly. "And a third man was waiting for them outside the house."

"He's the one who shot Bill?" Thomas cried skeptically. "This third man?"

"That's right."

The sheriff's mouth twisted contemptuously. "I said good night to Bill when him and Hildebrand left the hotel together."

"Hildebrand?" exclaimed Mrs. Grayson.

"Yes, it's Max Hildebrand out there in the road."

"Then it's Hildebrand I shot," said Bokker. "He shot at me first. If I hadn't gotten him . . ." He held up his left arm, as well as he could, calling attention to the bullet hole.

"What'd you expect him to do?" sneered the sheriff. "You were layin' out there in the dark, waitin' for them. You opened up——"

"No," said Bokker stubbornly. "The third man fired at them first. Hildebrand turned to run away and I happened to be in his way." His eyes went to his Navy gun lying on the table where Mrs. Grayson had deposited it. "I fired only once. . . ."

The sheriff turned, caught up the revolver and flicked out the cylinder. He scowled. "You took this gun from him?" he asked Mrs. Grayson.

"He dropped it when I covered him. Mose picked it up."

The sheriff whirled back to Bokker. "You had time to reload."

"Did I, Mrs. Grayson?" Bokker asked quietly.

She hesitated, but finally shook her head.

"He couldda had another gun," suggested Char Mechem.

Lige Thomas pounced on that. "We'll look for it when it's light."

SIX

There was a tiny room, with a barred window behind Lige Thomas's office. It contained a wooden cot and Bokker slept on it until daybreak. Shortly afterwards, there was much clomping of boots and harsh voices in Thomas's office.

After a while the door was opened and Thomas stuck in his head.

"C'mon," he said shortly.

A soldier wearing the shoulder straps of a major was in Thomas's office. "Major Holbrook, Provost Marshal," he said.

Bokker looked past him, saw soldiers outside the office.

"How are you, Major?"

Major Holbrook shook his head. "This is a bad business. The sheriff tells me——"

"Ah, yes, the sheriff," Bokker said.

Major Holbrook shrugged. "Very well, I've heard his version. Now let's have yours."

"Go ahead, tell him," Thomas prodded nastily.

The provost marshal made a gesture to Thomas to desist. "Let him tell it."

"I came to Raytown," Bokker said, "to ask Captain Grayson some questions——"

"Captain Grayson?" asked the provost marshal, emphasizing the title.

"Bill Grayson." Bokker shot a look at Lige Thomas and saw the scowl come over the sheriff's face. "I understood he rode with Quantrell and——"

"Whoa, there!" cried Lige Thomas. "You can't prove any such thing."

"He doesn't have to," snapped the provost marshal. "It's common knowledge that Grayson—and probably every man around here—was a bushwhacker at one time or another." He held up his hand as Lige Thomas started to protest. "Let's not go into that, Sheriff." He turned to Bokker. "Go ahead. Why did you want to question Grayson? What did you want to learn from him?"

"There's a magazine in my valise, *Fred Cowan's Ilustrated Weekly. . . .*"

"You mean this?" Major Holbrook stepped to the sheriff's desk and picked up the magazine, opened to the sketch of the late John Hovey. "A rather good likeness of you."

"So good," said Bokker grimly, "that you'd think the man who drew it had seen me."

"Apparently he had."

"I never met John Hovey and I was never in Lawrence in my life."

"That's just your say-so," interrupted Lige Thomas.

Major Holbrook's eyes glowed as he regarded the sheriff. "It seems to me, Sheriff, that you're awfully keen in pointing a finger at a man who was not a bushwhacker——"

"How do you know he wasn't?"

"For the moment, I'm taking his word."

"You'd rather take his word than believe the evidence?"

"What evidence?" asked the provost marshal. "Two men were killed and only one shot was fired from his gun. Mrs. Grayson admits hearing at least four or five shots altogether."

"He had another gun," exclaimed the sheriff. "He threw it away."

"Have your men found it?"

Lige Thomas scowled. "I'll be hearing from them any minute."

"Until you find a gun you've no case," snapped Major Holbrook. "At least not for the killing of Grayson. Hildebrand——"

"I'm not denying I killed Hildebrand," said Bokker. "He came at me shooting."

Major Holbrook nodded. "Sheriff, it's no secret that your sympathies are with the former Rebels."

"I was born and raised in this neck of the woods," growled Thomas. "These people are my friends. Most of them served in the Confederate Army—"

"Confederate Army, hell," exclaimed the provost marshal. "They were bushwhackers. I served here during the war. I know the kind of fighting they did. All right, the government gave them amnesty after the war. But that doesn't give them any right to keep on killing, or trying to kill, Union people." He pointed suddenly at Bokker. "You served in the Union Army——"

"Eleventh Wisconsin," Bokker said promptly.

"Forget it," said Thomas bitterly. "Two men were killed last night. A man was caught standing over one of them, a gun in his hand, but he can't be touched because he's a Union man——"

"Don't carry it too far," warned the provost marshal.

There was a commotion outside the door, then it was opened. Charr Mechem and another townsman entered. They were accompaniel by a sergeant.

"Well, Sergeant?" snapped the Major.

"No gun," replied the sergeant. "But there was plenty of evidence that a man was waitin' outside the Grayson place; a man and a horse. They took off in one helluva hurry."

The provost marshal looked inquiringly at Lige Thomas. The sheriff gestured to Charr Mechem. "What about it?"

"It's like the blue boy says," Charr Mechem admitted grudgingly.

"Satisfied, Sheriff?" asked the provost marshal.

"It's your show," replied Lige Thomas angrily.

"Then do you mind if I have a few words with Bokker—alone?"

The sheriff stamped out of the office. The others followed. When Bokker and Major Holbrook were alone, the provost marshal held up the copy of the magazine. "What's the straight of this?"

"I don't know, Major," Bokker repeated wearily. "I never knew John Hovey, I've never been in Lawrence and I never met a former guerrilla until yesterday."

"You weren't out here during the war?"

"No closer than St. Louis—and I was in the hospital there."

Major Holbrook frowned thoughtfully. "The picture couldn't be of someone who *looks* like you?"

"That was my first impression, but what do you think?"

The provost marshal studied the sketch. "It's an awfully close likeness of you; rather, the way you probably looked six years ago."

"I first saw the picture in 'sixty-four, a few months after it had been sketched. It looked exactly like I looked at the time. And there's no question about other people believing it's me. Last year I ran for prosecuting attorney in my county up in Wisconsin. My opponent dug this up and—well, it defeated me. That's when I made up my mind to run it down."

"And what've you found out so far?"

"Nothing—practically nothing. You heard what happened here yesterday. Two more of the men in the picture are dead."

"One of them you killed. The other . . .?" The major looked inquiringly at Bokker.

"Fletcher Trow and MacDonald Pierson, who are in the picture, are still alive."

"How do you know?"

Bokker hesitated. "They were identified for me."

"By whom?"

"A woman—perhaps a girl. She was in my room last night at the Raytown Hotel. She *said* she was Bill Grayson's sister."

"What do you mean, she said? Is she, or isn't she?"

"Bill Grayson has no sister."

"His wife?"

"No." Bokker paused. "I didn't see the girl—it was dark as the inside of a pocket in my room. I did grab at her as she ran out, but that's all it was—a grab. Yet I got the impression that she was younger than Mrs. Grayson."

Major Holbrook shook his head. "It beats me. What're your plans now?"

"To find Fletcher Trow and MacDonald Pierson."

"Here?"

"No one knows where Fletcher Trow is."

"And Pierson?"

"She didn't say. He could have been the man who waited outside of Bill Grayson's home last night."

"Who's probably halfway to Texas right now." The provost marshal grimaced. "That's where they all go, every bank absconder, murderer, fugitive from justice. There's a lot of room in Texas."

"There isn't enough room in Texas—or anywhere else—to hide from me. I've got a picture of MacDonald Pierson and Fletcher Trow and I'll find them."

"You know," Holbrook said thoughtfully, "I think maybe you will."

Bokker took the evening stage to Kansas City.

SEVEN

Bokker got a room at the Federal Hotel in Kansas City and slept late the following morning. When he awakened he had breakfast in the hotel dining room, then strolled to the square opposite the courthouse. Kansas City had grown during the war, passing its twin city, Westport, in population. In fact, people were already calling the two towns one and using the name of Kansas City.

In the Square, the City Marshal, John Speer, held forth, leaving only now and then to get a glass of beer at a convenient saloon. In spite of the railroad having pushed west and south, Kansas City was still the jumping-off place, and the return port of call to which freighters, cattlemen, buffalo hunters and men who roamed the plains came periodically.

To these men guns were as much a part of their apparel as the trousers and boots they wore. They were, in fact, more important, as they frequently owed their lives to their guns. The talk, around Speer, was mostly of guns . . . and adventures with guns.

Booker seated himself on the grass some distance from Speer and listened to the talk. He remained when the majority of the men adjourned to a nearby saloon, and he was still there when Speer and a few of his followers returned.

Speer eyed him thoughtfully. "Stranger?"

Bokker nodded.

"My name's Speer."

"I've heard it."

"Haven't heard you sound off."

"Somebody's got to do the listening."

The marshal grinned. "A man that listens good is welcome anywhere." He grunted. "Anythin' special you're listen' for?"

"Texas. I've been thinking of going there."

Speer's eyes narrowed. "Texas is no place for a *Union* man." He emphasized the word Union. "But it's a big state, a lot of room for a man to lose himself."

Bokker shook his head. "I'm not on the run." He paused a moment. "My name's Bokker."

"Bokker? Name's familiar." The marshal suddenly nodded. "Of course. You had some trouble over in Raytown." Speer stepped closer. "Join me in a glass of beer?"

Bokker got to his feet. "Don't mind if I do."

They crossed the street to a saloon. The marshal's face was creased in a thoughtful frown as they walked and he did not speak until the bartender had drawn beers for them and Speer had quaffed most of his rather large glass. Then he said, "The bushwhackers don't come into Kansas City very often. Only when they've got business to attend to and then they stay away from the Square."

"You were here during the war?" Bokker asked.

"Quite a lot."

"I don't suppose you got to know any of the—the guerrillas?"

"Guerrillas, hell, bushwhackers, that's all they were." Speer finished the rest of his beer and signaled for a refill. "At one time or another I guess I've seen just about all of the men who bushwhacked with Quantrell, Todd, Anderson. Yes, even those who were with Parker in 'sixty-one and 'sixty-two, before anyone ever heard of Quantrell."

The marshal drank some of his fresh glass. "You understand Kansas City and Westport were Union, but everything outside, in the brush country, was Secesh. Oh, there were people out there called themselves Union, but their menfolks did a lot of night riding. You understand these bushwhackers never had a real organization. A bunch of them would ride one time, another bunch another time. Then they'd take to the brush whenever we went after them. You couldn't prove any of them were bushwhackers. We knew the leaders, of course, and when we caught one of them, he had a short time of it, but the others . . ." Speer shrugged. "We'd have had to string up every man in about four counties. Not that we'd have hung many Union people if we'd done that."

Bokker nodded thoughtfully. "You knew Bill Grayson?"

"We had him in a dozen times. Always had somebody ready to swear that he was helping with the ploughing or butchering a hog."

Bokker hesitated. "And—Fletcher Trow?"

"I've seen him." Speer finished the last of his second glass of beer. "What do you really want to know?"

"MacDonald Pierson . . . I'm looking for him."

The marshal frowned. "He went through here like a bat out of hell the other night. One of my deputies saw him, but that was before we heard of the ruckus over in Raytown and there wasn't any reason to stop him."

"Which direction was he headed?"

Speer shrugged. "He didn't take the train, but that doesn't mean that he couldn't have got aboard across the river, over in Wyandotte—or further along the line. Gorey—that's the deputy who saw him—said his horse was pretty lathered. Rode hard from Raytown." Speer paused a moment, then said, "There's no charge against you, Bokker. Even Lige Thomas had to admit you shot Hildebrand in self-defense."

"Thomas, how come he's sheriff when the Union Army's in control here now?"

Speer grunted. "Thomas wasn't a bushwhacker. Oh, he's related to a bunch of them and he was born and raised in Raytown, but he enlisted with Sterling Price early in the war and remained with him right to the end. He's Secesh, all right, and a friend of all the bushwhackers. Like I said, we control Westport and Kansas City, but there are a lot of votes out in the county. There's some folks think that Secesh shouldn't be allowed to hold offices, but the army wants things to simmer down, and as long as Lige Thomas doesn't step across the line too far, they let him have his job." Speer spoke easily, carelessly and in the same tone and without pause, added, "Preston Kirk's in town, staying at the Federal Hotel."

"Preston Kirk?"

"From Lawrence."

Bokker said sharply, "I don't know anyone in Lawrence. I've never been there."

Speer toyed with his empty glass, then nodded as the bartender looked at him inquiringly. "I wouldn't advise you to go to Lawrence. It's six years, but they won't forget in sixty years what Quantrell did there." He paused. "I don't believe you were with Quantrell—the Raytown business proves that pretty well, but that picture in *Fred Cowan's Illustrated Weekly* would take a lot of explaining in Lawrence —and I don't think they're ready to listen."

"Do you think Preston Kirk would listen?"

"He might listen here—he might not in Lawrence."

Bokker nodded thoughtfully and dropped a dollar on the

bar to pay for the beers. He forgot to pick up his change, which Speer noted.

At the desk in the Federal Hotel, Bokker asked for Preston Kirk. The clerk pointed at a man seated in a rocking chair facing the street windows.

Bokker took a vacant chair beside Kirk. "My name is Bokker, Mr. Kirk," he said. "I understand you're from Lawrence."

"That I am," replied Kirk. "Best little town west of Kansas City." He was about thirty-five, a thin man with a balding blond head. He wore a serge suit and a fat gold watch chain dangled across his vest.

Bokker unfolded the old copy of *Fred Cowan's Illustrated Weekly*. "I imagine you've seen this, Mr. Kirk."

Kirk started to reach for the magazine, then recognized the cover and drew back. "Everyone in Lawrence has seen it. I—I was there when it happened." He regarded Bokker through slitted eyes. "I saw my father murdered."

"Where were you at the time?"

Kirk scowled. "Underneath the sidewalk. I heard them coming down the street, saw what they were doing and I ran out of the store—yes, by the rear door. I got underneath the house and crawled all the way to the front, right under the wooden sidewalk. It was a good thing I went that far, too, because they burned down the store. I got a little singed, even under the sidewalk."

"You say you saw your father killed?"

"He was staying in the Eldridge House—he was an independent sort, wouldn't live with the wife and me. And he had a little money." Kirk paused. "He was active in the Abolition movement and Quantrell had his name on the list. For that matter, my own name was on it, but they didn't find me."

"The people inside the Eldridge House surrendered," Bokker said.

"Damned cowards," exclaimed Kirk. "Have you ever seen the place? Three stories and built like a fort. They could have stood off Quantrell for a week, but no, they surrendered. Not my father. A few of them fought as long as they could, but with the front doors opened to the bushwhackers, they had no chance. My father was wounded and dragged out to

the street. There he was murdered . . . less than fifty feet from where I was at the time."

Bokker opened *Cowan's Weekly* to the Quantrell sketch. He tapped it lightly with his finger.

"The man who drew this, John Hovey—he was in Lawrence at the time?"

Kirk nodded. "He was in the hotel. He was brought out with the others, when they surrendered. His name wasn't on Quantrell's list, so they didn't bother him."

"If he was outside the hotel, he was in a position to see what happened?"

Kirk started to nod again, then suddenly exclaimed. He snatched the magazine from Bokker, stared closely at it, then raised his eyes to Bokker's face.

"Yes," said Bokker grimly. "My face—but I wasn't there."

Kirk looked at Bokker a long moment. "I don't know," he said slowly. "I really don't know. The way I was I couldn't see everybody. There was a lot of movement back and forth, a lot of—of shooting and yelling. But I've studied this picture so many times——"

"I've never been in Lawrence in my life!"

"Don't go there!" cried Kirk. "The people haven't forgotten. Your life wouldn't be worth a Secesh nickel." He looked again at the sketch. "Hovey was in a position to see everyone. . . ."

"I wasn't there," persisted Bokker.

"Then how'd he get your picture?"

"I don't know. According to the magazine people, this was sent to them, from Baxter Springs, Kansas. There was a note with it, signed with Quantrell's name. Whether it was actually written by Quantrell, or whether it was a forgery, they had no way of knowing. The note said that the sketch had been found on John Hovey on the battlefield . . ."

"They called it a battle?" sneered Kirk. "It was a massacre!"

"From your viewpoint." Bokker winced and added quickly, "From our viewpoint. I was in the Union Army myself—the Eleventh Wisconsin.'"

"In August, eighteen sixty-three?"

"From April 'sixty-one until July 'sixty-five."

"You could have had a furlough in 'sixty-three."

"I had one—in the hospital. I was wounded at Vicksburg in June. In August, eighteen sixty-three, when Quantrell

sacked Lawrence I was flat on my back in a St. Louis hospital. I can prove that."

"All right," conceded Kirk, "I'll take your word for it. Then tell me how your picture came to be here with these others."

"That's what I'm trying to find out. I've had these others identified. This is Quantrell—here's George Todd and Bloody Bill Anderson. They're dead. Bill Grayson—that's this one—was killed over in Raytown, a couple of days ago."

"By you?"

"No! By MacDonald Pierson. *I* killed Max Hildebrand."

Kirk shrugged. "I read about it in the papers, but you can never tell what the real story is. I thought perhaps——"

"The story in the papers was true."

Kirk pointed at another sketch in the old magazine.

"MacDonald Pierson," Bokker said. "Alive. And this other one is Fletcher Trow. Nobody seems to know much about him, but I've reason to believe he's alive."

Preston Kirk took the magazine from Bokker's hand and pointed at the likeness of Phil Bokker. "You say this isn't you—you weren't even in Lawrence at the time. Just for the sake of argument, let's say that's all true, but then—then who's the man who's wearing your face?"

Not even Major Holbrook, the Provost Marshal, had thought of that question. But it was the one that Bokker had asked himself for years. A man, wearing his face, was shown in the act of killing another man. If it wasn't Bokker—and that Bokker knew—who was it?

He said, "That's the man I want to find. I want MacDonald Pierson, Fletcher Trow, but most of all, I want to find *that* man!"

EIGHT

Carrying his valise, Phil Bokker boarded the morning train. The Kansas & Pacific Railroad started shortly after the close of the war, had crept into Kansas, but was now bogged down in the southwestern part of the state. The company was, however, doing an excellent business, shipping Texas steers to Kansas City and would soon have enough capital to continue its westward building.

Bokker had bought a ticket to the end of the line, railhead, a place called Pawnee City.

He entered the day coach and looked around for a seat. The coach was well filled and it was a moment before he found a vacancy beside an elderly man wearing a soiled sack suit. He started to put his valise on the rack overhead and then his eyes fell upon a man seated two seats away.

The man was facing Bokker and recognition came into his eyes.

"Bokker!" he cried. "Phil Bokker."

Bokker strode forward to grip the man's hand. "Paul Shay! It's six years . . ."

". . . since we had beds next to each other in the St. Louis hospital," exclaimed Shay.

He was a well-built man of thirty-odd. He wore a serge suit of excellent material. A derby sat rakishly upon his head and a fat gold watch chain spread across his brocaded vest.

Shay continued, "What in the world are you doing in Kansas?"

"I've got a ticket to Pawnee City."

"So have I. I'm going out to buy cattle for my company."

"You a cattle buyer?"

"Why not? It's a good business. That is, it ought to be, if I can buy any cattle in Pawnee City. I understand there's quite a bit of competition for the Texas trail herds. What's with you, Phil? I thought you'd be a big Wisconsin politician by this time."

"I ran for office last year. I was defeated."

The man seated beside Shay got to his feet. "I'll change seats with you," he said to Bokker. "You two are old friends——"

"Thank you, sir!" exclaimed Shay.

The man got his valise and carried it back to Bokker's seat, Bokker got his own bag and put it in the rack over Paul Shay. Then he sat down beside Shay.

"Now tell me about this cattle-buying job of yours, Paul. I've heard of these Longhorns the Texans are bringing north, over the—what is it?— The Chisholm Trail."

"It's big business, Phil," said Shay. "There are several million Longhorns running practically wild on the plains of Texas. They're worth about three dollars down there for hide and tallow. But those same Longhorns brought to the railroad here in Kansas are worth twenty-five and thirty dollars a head."

Bokker nodded. "Is it true about those Texas men, that they're still fighting the North?"

Shay coughed gently. "As a matter of fact, I've only lately gone to work for the Midwest Livestock Company and this is my first trip. I've been warned, however, that the Texans are rather handy with their guns."

"You faced Texas Regiments during the war?"

"I was with Lyon at Carthage and Wilson's Creek. Ben McCullough's Texans gave us hell. However, they've had four years of Union Occupation. You'd think they'd be tamed by this time."

"I hope so," said Bokker, "because I may have to go down into Texas."

Shay looked at him sharply. "Why?"

Bokker hesitated. Then he reached for his valise, opened it and brought out the copy of *Fred Cowan's Illustrated Weekly*. He opened it to John Hovey's sketch and pointed at the picture of himself.

"Who does that look like, Paul?"

Shay barely glanced at it before he exclaimed, "Why, it's you, Phil."

"Read it!"

Shay scanned the article, then looked at Bokker, puzzled. "I don't understand. You were in the hospital when I got there in August, and you were there when I left in September. You *couldn't* have been at Lawrence."

"I wasn't, but that's a picture of me. It cost me the office of county prosecutor up in Wisconsin."

"But how, Phil? Your service record——"

"My opponent didn't spring this until shortly before the election, when there wasn't time for me to dispute it. Sure, I was able to prove—after the election—that I was in the hospital during August, 'sixty-three."

"That's the damndest thing I ever heard of." Shay scrutinized the sketch once more. "This fellow who drew it—John Hovey—is he an enemy of yours?"

"I never met the man in my life. According to the caption, Hovey was killed by Quantrell at the Baxter Springs Massacre. The sketch was mailed in by Quantrell himself—at least that's the way the magazine people recall it."

"Haven't they got the original?"

"There was a fire at the offices of the magazine early in 'sixty-five and they lost all of their files and records. But the same man's still editor and he says that a letter came along with the drawing. It was signed by Charles W. Quantrell and was to the effect that this had been found on the body of John Hovey after his death."

"And you say you never met Hovey?"

"Never. At least not by that name."

"Is it possible that someone could have changed the original drawing? Erased the face of the man drawn by Hovey and substituted your own?"

"I've considered that possibility, Paul, but who? I have no enemies."

"You're in politics."

"I wasn't, in 'sixty-three. Besides, the man who had the opportunity to change it would have had to be one of Quantrell's men. Nobody knew me in New York—certainly no one at the magazine office. The change, if a change had been made, had to be done before the sketch was mailed." Bokker frowned. "You weren't in Kansas City yesterday?"

"I got in late last night."

"Obviously you didn't buy a Kansas City newspaper. My name's been splashed over it the last couple of days. I—I had some trouble over in Raytown, a village near Kansas City."

Shay regarded Bokker quizzically. "Trouble? Over—this?"

Bokker nodded. "Raytown's a hotbed of former guerrillas. Two of the men—probably three—who're in this sketch lived in Raytown."

"Lived? You put that in the past tense."

Bokker frowned. "That's what the trouble was. This man, Bill Grayson"—he touched the sketch of Grayson with a finger—"he was ambushed outside of his house."

"By you?"

"No. But I was there and I—well, I did kill his friend, Max Hildebrand."

Shay lowered his voice. "You're on the run now?"

"No," Bokker replied quickly. "I've been cleared." He paused. "Three men who were in this picture are still living. MacDonald Pierson . . . Fletcher Trow . . ."

"You said three?"

"The third—I *think*—is the man whose face was actually in this picture, the man whose face was changed to my own."

Seated opposite Shay and Bokker was a grizzled man in buckskin. His seatmate was a man of about forty, clad in gray Prince Albert, gray serge trousers and a gray derby. He wore a flowered vest and a gray cravat, in which was stuck a huge pin that was either a diamond or a very good imitation.

The man in gray leaned toward Paul Shay. "We've a long trip ahead of us. Would you gentlemen care for a game of cards?"

Shay looked at Bokker. "It's eight hours to Pawnee City."

Bokker shrugged. "If the stakes aren't too high."

The man in buskskins brightened. "I just sold me a load of buffalo skins in Kansas City."

The man in the gray costume produced a pack of cards. "I just happen to have some cards with me . . ."

Paul Shay smiled thinly. "If you don't mind, I'd prefer a new pack." He signaled to the conductor, who was collecting tickets a few seats away. When the man came over he said, "Is there a newsboy on the train? I'd like to buy some playing cards."

The conductor produced a sealed, fresh pack of cards from a pocket. "Just happened to have a pack with me." He grinned. "Big demand for cards on this train. That'll be a dollar."

Shay gave the conductor a dollar. The latter then got a table, made of two painted boards nailed together with a couple of crosspieces. The players laid this upon their knees.

Bokker had played much poker during his army days and had played several times with Paul Shay when they had both been in the hospital. He remembered him as an indifferent player, but such was not the case now. Shay dealt smoothly, played his cards with confidence and bet boldly.

The man in the gray Prince Albert, who gave his name as Charles Templeton, played them close—like a professional. The surprise, to Bokker, however, was the buffalo hunter. He talked a fast, reckless game, but bet his cards shrewdly and carefully. After an hour of playing he was forty dollars ahead. Templeton, the obvious professional, was the big loser, more than fifty dollars. Shay was a few dollars ahead and Bokker had contributed twelve dollars to the others.

It was about this time that Bokker became aware of the girl who sat across the aisle, two seats toward the rear of the coach. She was apparently in her early twenties, a beautiful girl with dark brown hair and the bluest eyes he had ever seen in a woman. She wore a brown suit of excellent material, topped by a dark green hat. She was reading a magazine, but Bokker's eyes, flickering toward her occasionally, met her blue eyes. Each time she dropped them to her reading.

A big pot came. Bokker, with three sixes, opened for two dollars. Shay raised him five. The buffalo hunter called the five-dollar raise and increased it five himself. Templeton, the dealer, merely called.

"One card," said Bokker.

Tmepleton looked at him quizzically and dealt the card.

"Two for me," Shay said.

"I like what I got," cried the buffalo hunter, Jed Jethro. "And I'll raise whoever bets."

Templeton grunted. "The dealer takes three cards. Apparently I'm low man. Opener?"

"Ten dollars," said Bokker.

"I'll double that," Shay said quietly.

"And I'll double *that!*" chortled Jethro. "Just like I said I would. Cost you forty, Mr. Templeton."

Templeton studied his cards long and carefully. "I guess I'm forced to call."

Bokker had drawn a fourth six. He started to count out forty dollars, then suddenly put back the money and tossed in his cards. "Beats me."

He sent a quick look at Templeton and thought that he detected consternation. The expression, however, if Bokker did see it, was a fleeting one.

Shay said, "I'll bet twenty dollars."

Jethro held up his hand. "Mind if I see your openers?" he asked of Bokker.

Bokker gathered up his discards, exposed three sixes. Jethro whistled. "And you threw in three of a kind?"

Bokker shrugged. "The bets are too high for three sixes."

"You said it," chortled Jethro. "I call the twenty and raise it forty."

Templeton grunted. "I'm low man, I guess, but I'll just see that forty and raise it"—he hesitated—"fifty dollars."

Paul Shay examined his cards once more. He scowled. "Costs me ninety to call."

"An' I get a chance to raise again," Jethro said smugly.

"I still think I've got the best hand," Shay said, but showed worry.

"Call, then," Templeton suggested. "But you'd better have it, because I don't mind telling you that I drew awfully well to my one pair."

"Ninety dollars," mused Shay. "That's a lot of money."

"That's about thirty buffalo," grinned Jethro. "And I don't mind telling you right now it's going to cost you about thirty more buffaloes."

"In that case," Shay said, coming to a sudden decision, "I call the ninety and—raise it a hundred!"

"Hey!" cried Jethro. "The man's got stuff! Well, I call that hundred and raise her two hundred."

"This started out as a friendly game," Bokker reminded.

"A man's got no friends in a poker game," Templeton said drily. "That's three hundred to me. Well, I just happen to have three hundred dollars more in my poke. If I lose, I'm broke."

Perpiration broke out upon Paul Shay's face. "If I call you, I've got about forty dollars left. Well—easy come, easy go!"

He counted out six hundred dollars and put it on the line. The buffalo hunter, Jethro, somewhat worried finally, reached into his pocket and produced a buffalo-skin purse. It was heavy with gold coins. "I call," he said, dropping the purse on the table.

"All *I've* got," said Templeton, "is a full house, tens up."

Triumph came to Shay's face. "I can top that—four eights."

"Me," said Jethro, "I've got a king-high straight—only they happen to be all hearts——"

"A straight flush!" ejaculated Templeton. "That wins!"

"It sure does!"

"That's a very handsome pot," Shay said slowly. He

hesitated, then nodded. "And as far as I'm concerned, it ends the game."

"I'm cleaned myself," said Templeton, the professional gambler.

"That leaves me and you," Jethro said, addressing Bokker.

Bokker shook his head. "I don't care for freeze-out."

"In that case," said Jethro, gathering up the money, "I think I'll go hunt me up a game in the next car."

"You've a nice stake," Templeton suggested. "You ought to save it."

"I can double it," Jethro said confidently. He stowed money into his pockets, then raised the board table and got up. "See you later, gents."

He climbed over the knees of the other men and headed up the aisle. Shay watched him go, glowering, then nudged Bokker. "Phil, like to have a word with you . . ."

Templeton got to his feet. "No sense you two leaving. I'm broke, but I'd just as soon go and watch our buffalo hunter friend awhile." He smiled brightly, got to his feet.

He was scarcely out of earshot than Paul Shay exclaimed, "We've been taken, Phil!"

"You," said Bokker. "I lost only twenty-two dollars."

"I dropped over seven hundred," groaned Shay. "And it wasn't my money."

Bokker winced. "You gambled with your company money?"

"That's my trouble, Phil," said Shay worriedly. "I get in a game, I forget myself."

"You weren't like that when we were in the hospital together."

"I didn't have any money then." He was silent a moment. Then he said slowly, "Of course I can get money from the Pawnee City bank, for buying cattle, but I'll have to make up that seven hundred somehow."

"I've got about two hundred dollars," Bokker said, "if half of that will help you . . ."

"It wouldn't, Phil!" exclaimed Shay. "Anyway, I wouldn't take it from you. It isn't losing the money that makes me so damn mad, it's being a sucker. I have the feeling that the buffalo hunter and Templeton are working together."

"That's why I dropped out," said Bokker, "with four sixes."

"Four sixes!"

"I happened to notice that Jethro's hands were a little too soft-looking for a buffalo hunter."

Paul Shay half rose. "Why, the dirty . . ." His hand went under his coat toward his hip.

Bokker threw out a detaining hand. "Hold it, Paul! You're no gunfighter."

"I can shoot as well as the next man."

"You're still an amateur, Paul. I have an idea that Templeton's a professional. In gunfighting as well as card-playing. And Jethro's probably just as good—or bad."

"I've never backed down to a man yet."

"This isn't a question of backing down. They didn't force us to play cards."

Shay hesitated. "You're right, Phil. Anyway, they're headed for Pawnee City. I'll be seeing them again. And maybe . . ." He reseated himself, a gleam in his eyes.

NINE

Bokker's eyes flickered to the girl two seats away. She was standing up, struggling to wrestle a rather heavy carpetbag down from the overhead rack. Her seat companion was a middle-aged woman and facing them were two nondescript-looking men. One of these got to his feet.

"Allow me, madam!"

He thrust his hands up to the rack, one of them clawing at the bag, the other gripping the girl's wrist.

"I can manage," she said distinctly.

"No trouble, madam!" persisted the man.

He gripped at the bag with one hand, at her wrist with the other. He brought away her hand and the bag came down. It was heavier than he had expected and slipped through his one hand, bouncing the girl's shoulder and striking her in the stomach.

"You oaf!" she cried, in pain.

The man leaned over, grabbing both of her hands in his and caressing them. "Sorry, madam, I tried to help you, but the bag slipped." He continued to chafe her hands, although it was her shoulder and body that had been struck by the bag.

Angrily the girl jerked her hands free. "Let me alone!"

"Only tryin' to help, ma'am."

The girl leaned forward to pick up the bag. The man also stooped at the same time and their heads collided. The girl cried out in pain. Again the man reached for her hands, managed to secure one and began to massage it.

"Sorry, ma'am, guess I'm just too clumsy for . . ."

The girl, exclaiming, tried to free her hand of the man's grip. He clung to it. There was only one thing left for the girl to do. She swung her free hand and cracked the man's face with a stinging blow.

"What's the idea, girlie?" he snarled.

"You've pawed me enough," snapped the girl.

"Oh, yeah? Well, that's what you're used to, ain't you?"

Bokker got to his feet and took two quick steps forward. He grabbed the man by the coat collar, jerked him out into the aisle and gave him a hard, quick shove.

The man lurched forward, stumbled and hit the floor of the swaying coach. For just an instant he lay stunned, then let out a roar and scrambled to his feet.

He began to mouth curses as his hand went under his coat. Bokker, who had not expected gunplay, lunged forward. He struck out with his left hand, a flailing blow. It caught the arm of the man just as the hand came clear with a stubby revolver. The blow knocked the gun hand aside. Bokker, stepping in, smashed the man a savage blow on the jaw that again sent him to the floor, this time on his back.

The gun clattered to the floor behind the man. Bokker stepped quickly past him, one foot stepping on an arm. He scooped up the gun, continued on to the end of the car. He jerked open the door and threw the gun out and sidewards.

Then he turned.

The man he had knocked down was getting weakly to his feet. "Wasn't no call to hit a man," he whined. "I was on'y havin' some fun."

"Have it with someone else," Bokker said curtly.

"I wasn't hurtin' the lady."

"You weren't helping her any."

The man hesitated, then backed to his vacated seat. He reached up and got his bag down from the rack. Shooting a black look at Bokker, he went past him and out of the coach.

Bokker watched him go. He nodded to the girl and intended to go on to his own seat. The girl said, "Thank you!"

"It was no trouble, miss."

"I'm sorry you had to fight him. He—he might have shot you."

"I don't think so."

"Nevertheless, I'm grateful. I—this is my first trip away from home." She smiled nervously. "But I mustn't tell you my troubles."

Bokker waited a moment, then when she didn't go on, he said, "You're going to Pawnee City?"

"Is—is it so terrible in Pawnee City?"

"I don't know. I haven't been there. But I understand it's a boom town and boom towns are apt to be wild."

"That's what they—they told me, at home."

"Where's that?"

"Ohio. A little place called Canal Dover. There's no chance there for a girl to make a living and when my father died—well, to make a long story short, I read an article in a Cleveland paper. It told about Pawnee City . . . said it was a—I think those were the words—a rip-roaring town, where everybody had plenty of money and the cowboys thought nothing of paying fifteen and even twenty dollars for a hat to take back to Texas. So I thought: Well, I do know something about making hats."

Bokker frowned. "You're going to Pawnee City to—to make hats?"

"The way you put it, it sounds ridiculous. But I've got to do something to earn my living. The little money I have would soon be gone if I stayed in Canal Dover."

Paul Shay came up behind Bokker and tapped him lightly on the shoulder. Bokker looked over his shoulder and saw Shay smirk. "This is my friend, Paul Shay, Miss . . . ?"

"Compton. Ruth Compton."

"Delighted, Miss Compton!" cried Shay.

"I," said Bokker, "am Phill Bokker."

"Miss Compton," continued Shay, "we've a double seat vacant opposite us. Since we're all going to the same place, why don't you come over and join us?"

Ruth Compton hesitated. Her eyes went to the door through which her recent neighbor had gone into the next coach. "Very well," she said, "I suppose I might as well accustom myself to the free-and-easy spirit of the West."

"Exactly," said Paul Shay. "There are no strangers in the West. Enemies, yes. Friends, positively; but no one's a stranger. Everyone talks to everyone else." He grinned. "So they tell me."

TEN

The bellowing of thousands of cattle, grazing on the plains near Pawnee City, was the signal for the passengers on the train to gather together their belongings. The train slackened its speed, the engine bell tolling.

Bokker carried his own valise and that of Ruth Compton. Paul Shay escorted Ruth out of the coach, helped her to the station platform.

It was an unpainted depot, built of fresh, raw lumber, as were most of the buildings on the single street that ran south from the depot.

Ruth stopped on the depot platform. Sudden panic seemed to grip her as she looked down the teeming street. Bokker did not wonder. There were six inches of dust on the street that was choked with wagons, horses and a seething mass of humanity.

Most of the buildings were one-story or one-story with false fronts to give the illusion of being two stories. There were probably three legitimate two-story buildings. No less than twenty of the buildings in the quarter mile of street were saloons.

Above the hammering of carpenters on new buildings being erected there rose the babel of voices—chattering, talking, yelling and screaming voices.

Somewhere a man howled like a wolf, punctuating his howl with a sudden burst of gunfire.

Ruth Compton exclaimed and shrank back against the steady arm of Paul Shay.

"It's great," enthused Shay, looking down the street. "More exciting than I dreamed it would be."

"You like this?" gasped Ruth.

"I love it!"

"I like a quiet town," said Phil Bokker.

"You, Phil?" cried Paul Shay. "Why, you breed trouble."

Ruth looked at Bokker in surprise. They had not touched on his adventures in Raytown during the journey to Pawnee City. Shay remembered now and winced. "Sorry, Phil."

"I think we'd better see if we can get rooms," Bokker said grimly.

They started down the street, Bokker still carrying Ruth's bag as well as his own. They were turning into the two-story PAWNEE CITY HOTEL when Shay became aware that it was Bokker who had carried the girl's valise.

"Here, let me help you with that!" he exclaimed, taking the bag from Bokker.

The lobby was small, with a saloon opening off to the left. A heavy-set man with a gold toothpick in his mouth stood behind the desk, frowning at the hotel register.

"We'd like rooms," Bokker said.

The hotel man sized them up, evidently speculating as to the relationship among the three. "How many?" he asked.

"Three," Bokker said quickly.

The man grunted. He scowled at the register. "I got a nice room at the front of the house with a double bed, but outside of that I ain't got a thing except one little room at the back."

"The big front room would be fine for Miss Compton," said Shay generously.

"Rather noisy, though," remarked Bokker. He frowned. "Is—is there another place in town rents rooms?"

"I got the only hotel in town," retorted the hotel man, "and if the lady takes the big room, I got to charge for two. I usually put two into every room, as it is. That's one thing this town needs, rooms for travelers. The cowboys don't mind bunking out on the prairie, but it's the commercial people, the gamblers, the cattle buyers, all of them's got to sleep indoors and there just ain't room for them all."

Templeton, the gambler, entered the hotel.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "Here we are again."

"We'll take the rooms," Bokker said. "Miss Compton will have the front room and"—he looked inquiringly at Shay—"I guess you and I will have to share the small room."

"That's nonsense," said Ruth Compton. "*I'll* take the small room."

"It's settled," said Paul Shay promptly.

"No, it isn't. As a matter of fact I—I don't think I can afford to pay double. How much is it?"

"Six dollars," replied the hotel man.

"Six dollars a week? I'm afraid that's too high for——"

"Six dollars a day, ma'am," was the correction.

Ruth let out an exclamation of dismay. "I can't pay six dollars a day for a room."

"Prices are high in Pawnee City," observed the hotel man.

He looked inquiringly at Templeton. "You wish a room, sir?"

"Naturally. The best you've got in the house, sir!"

"Take the room," Bokker said angrily to Ruth. "For one night, at least. It'll give you time to look around."

Ruth's forehead creased in worry. "I suppose I'll have to, but . . ." She left the sentence unfinished.

Bokker signed the register for himself and Paul Shay, then hesitated and handed the pen to Ruth. She signed quickly.

The hotel man slid two keys across the desk. "Here you are, folks, and that's all I can do." He smiled at Templeton. "Unless one of my guests happens to be killed this evening, I'm full up."

Bokker again took up Ruth's bag, as well as his own. Shay carried his bag and the keys. They climbed the stairs to the second floor and Shay found Ruth's room, Number 5, at the front of the house. He opened the door, revealing the "large" room. It was about nine by twelve feet in size, containing an unsavory-looking bed, a stand with a pitcher and bowl and a small chair. Nails in the wall served in lieu of a closet.

"This is the *big* room?" cried Shay. "I wonder what we've drawn."

"We'll soon find out," said Bokker. He deposited Ruth's bag on the floor, nodded and walked down the hall. Shay followed closely. Their own room was Number 11. It was nine by six feet, with a narrow bed and washstand. It contained no chair.

Shay looked at the bed. "It's a good thing neither of us is very fat or we'd never make it. Do you turn much in your sleep?"

"Not that I know of."

Both men took off their coats and rolled up their sleeves. Shay poured water from the pitcher into the bowl and began to lave his hands.

"What do you think of the little lady, Phil?"

"I think she ought to start back for Ohio tomorrow morning."

Shay chuckled. "I'll admit that I don't think Pawnee City's the place for her, but don't forget she was handling herself very well with that mucker when you interrupted." He shook his head. "I've an idea that she's got more spunk than either of us realize. You suggest that she take the train home."

"You like her, Paul?"

Shay, splashing water on his face, did not reply until he

reached for the single towel. "I like her—yes." He paused. "You?"

"I'm not going to fall in love with any woman," Bokker replied promptly, "not until I get my life straightened out."

"That may take a while, Phil," Shay said thoughtfully. "I've been thinking about your problem all day . . ." He grinned faintly. "Yes, while I was chattering. Suppose you find MacDonald Pierson and Fletcher Trow? What then?"

"They know the name of the man who was with them in Lawrence."

"And what if they don't tell you who it was?"

"They'll tell me!'

"Did Bill Grayson tell you?"

Bokker's eyes narrowed. Shay held up a cautioning hand. "I'm just trying to put the worst light on it, Phil. To show you what you're up against. You're a civilized man, Quantrell and his bushwhackers were savages. Cutthroats and murderers."

"Not all of them," replied Bokker. "A former circuit judge rode with them. At least two men who'd been preachers——"

"One preacher stayed in Lawrence," said Shay, his lips curling in contempt. "The Reverend Alonzo Skaggs. They dragged his body up and down the street and finally set it on fire."

"I'm writing no brief on behalf of the guerrillas," Bokker said evenly. "I've more reason to hate them than most. And I know what they did on the border. But I also know what some Union men did—men who plundered with Jennison and Anthony—and Jim Lane. They were fighting the war back there in 'fifty-four. But the sacking of Lawrence was arson and murder. No one can condone it by any rules of warfare. What happened is too well known, too well documented to condone. That's why I've got to clear myself; because the picture of me in that old magazine shows a man who was one of the very worst of the guerrillas, a killer who murdered a man in cold blood. I've got to find that man—and clear myself. Until then——"

"Until then, you can't find yourself a woman and settle down," Shay said crookedly. "Fine, Phil, that leaves the field clear for me."

"Sometimes, Paul," Bokker said testily, "you're a hard man to like."

"Nobody likes me," Shay said cheerfully. "And my

employers are going to like me least of all if I don't raise that seven hundred dollars for them that I lost in the poker game. Come on, hurry up and get washed."

Bokker stepped to the washstand, then looked over his shoulder. "Are we in a hurry?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

Shay chuckled. "I told you—I've got to raise that money. So I can buy some cattle and give the sellers earnest money."

"How do you figure to raise this money?"

"The same way I lost it."

Bokker exclaimed, "You're going to buck the professional games?"

"Templeton and Jethro were professionals. Only I didn't know it then. I'd like a return session with them."

"Don't, Paul," Bokker said earnestly. "You're in deep enough now. Don't make it worse."

"We'll see," Shay said evasively. "Now, how about some supper?"

"I'm ready."

They left the tiny room and started for the stairs. As they reached them, Bokker indicated Ruth Compton's room.

Shay nodded and stepped past Bokker to the door. He knocked on it.

"We're going out to have some supper. Come along."

There was a slight pause, then Ruth said through the door: "Thanks, but I'm not hungry. I—I got pretty tired on the train and I'd like to get some sleep."

"All right, Ruth," Shay replied. "We'll size up the town for you."

He turned back to Bokker.

They descended to the lobby and Shay stepped quickly to the saloon and looked in. He nodded as he came back to Bokker. "It's all right."

They left the hotel and crossed the street to a restaurant run by a Chinese. They had a hearty supper of fried steak, potatoes, coffee and a gooey substance that was supposedly pudding.

When they came out of the café, it was getting dark outside. The street seemed more crowded than earlier. And it was noisier, if that were possible.

"She's going to have to be awfully tired if she can sleep through this," Shay said.

Just then a cowboy came out of the hotel across the street. He ducked under the hitchrail, sprang upon a horse and whirling it into the street, pulled out his revolver.

"Whoop-whoop-whoopee!" he screamed at the top of his voice and emptied his six-shooter at the sky. He sent his horse galloping down the street, causing pedestrians to jump out of his way.

A lean man stood at the edge of the high wooden sidewalk and smoked a thin cigar placidly. He wore a vest on which was pinned a star.

Phil Shay pointed at the star. "You're the law?"

"Some of it," the man replied laconically.

"And you let a man shoot like that?"

"He wasn't hurtin' anybody."

"He might have, though."

"Then I'd a run him into the calaboose. Strangers in town, eh?"

"We arrived on the train this afternoon," Bokker said.

The lawman nodded. "Pawnee City's a good town. A live town. Two things you can't do in Pawnee City. You can't kill nobody and you can't cheat in cards. Understand?"

"But anything else is all right?" Shay asked sarcastically.

"Up to a point, mister. Up to a point."

"Well, you tell me when I get to that point," Shay said. He started across the street. Bokker followed.

"This town has possibilities," Shay remarked cryptically, as he entered the hotel.

Inside the lobby he turned automatically into the saloon, Bokker at his heels.

The place had filled up since Shay had peeked into it earlier. It was jammed now, a room some twenty-five feet wide by forty deep, holding a long bar, a dozen tables and more than fifty patrons. Three bartenders were behind the bar. A half-dozen gambling games were going on.

"Let me have that hundred now," Shay said to Bokker.

"For gambling?"

"What's the difference? You said you'd let me have it."

Bokker was loath to part with the money, but he had volunteered it on the train. He hesitated only briefly, then brought out a handful of money and counted out three double eagles and four ten-dollar gold pieces.

"I'll see that you don't lose it," Shay said, and moved toward one of the faro games.

Bokker stepped to the bar and ordered a glass of beer. He drank it slowly as he surveyed the room. The games of chance were boisterous, noisy. A man would leave a faro game, go to the bar and have a drink of whiskey, then go back to the game, sometimes carrying a second drink with him.

Bokker wondered idly what the din would be like later on in the evening. He wondered, too, how noisy it was upstairs in Ruth Compton's room. The floor was thin, as were the walls.

ELEVEN

A heavy hand clapped Bokker on the shoulder. "Here you are, pardner!" boomed Jethro, the pseudo-buffalo hunter. "Wondered what'd become of you."

"Where's your partner?" Bokker asked pointedly.

"My partner? What partner?"

"Templeton."

Jethro looked at Bokker with assumed surprise, then chuckled. "You got wise, huh?"

"I didn't think you were a buffalo hunter."

Jethro grinned. "It was an honest game."

"I'm not complaining. I lost only twenty-two dollars."

"Which I'll be glad to give you back if you think I didn't win it fair and square."

"It was a cheap price for the lesson." Bokker nodded toward the table where Shay was playing faro. "Paul Shay thought *his* lesson was a little stiff. I'd keep away from him if I were you."

"Him?" sniffed Jethro. He shrugged and walked toward the table where Shay was playing.

Bokker put his glass on the bar and followed Jethro.

About a dozen men were gathered around the table. The dealer was an icy eyed man of about thirty. An unlit cigar was in the corner of his mouth.

"Make your bets, gentlemen," he droned. "Are you ready? I'm dealing." He slipped two cards smoothly out of the card case. "King wins, seven loses." He gathered up money from the layout, paid out money. He put a double eagle on a king and looked inquiringly at Paul Shay.

"Let it go," said Shay carelessly.

Money was scattered about on the various cards, all of them being played. The dealer dealt again. Still stonelessly, he said, "The king wins again, the trey loses." He added two gold pieces to Shay's.

"Copper your bets, gentlemen," the dealer said. "From soda to hock."

He slipped out two cards. "And the final king wins once more." He added four gold coins to Shay's.

Jethro crowded in beside Shay. "Let's have a new deal now," he said. "A good deal."

The dealer regarded Jethro impassively. "Not in my game," he said coolly.

"My money's as good as anyone else's," retorted Jethro.

"It's good money," put in Shay. "I ought to know. It was mine before you robbed it from me."

A sudden hush fell upon the immediate vicinity of the faro game. It was broken by Jethro. "Say that again, mister!" His hand darted down below the level of the table. Bokker, behind Jethro, caught the arm and gripped it hard.

"Drop it, Jethro!" he said in the buffalo hunter-gambler's ear.

Shay said coldly, "The man doesn't want you in his game. Neither do I."

He rocked Jethro's head with a hard blow of his open hand, raked it back and gave Jethro the knuckles.

"Lemme go," cried Jethro with fine passion, "lemme go, and I'll cut out his heart."

The law man with whom Bokker and Shay had spoken on the street pushed his way through the crowd.

"Let go!" he said softly.

Bokker released Jethro. Shay already had his gun out and was pointing it at Jethro. "Now," said the law man, "what's the trouble?"

"The man's a card shark," Shay declared. "He robbed me of seven hundred dollars on the train."

"On the train," said the marshal, nodding. "I got nothing to do with that—not my territory."

"I'll kill 'im!" Jethro said hoarsely. "I'll kill him. Nobody c'n slap Jed Jethro around."

"*I* can,' said the marshal carelessly. His hand came up and smacked Jethro a resounding blow on the face. A murmur of approval ran through the onlookers.

"I told him I didn't want him in my game," the faro dealer offered. "That buckskin getup fooled me once, but it won't again."

"Mister," said Jethro ominously, "you got hardware on your chest. I got respect for the law when I'm in a town. On'y don't meet me outside of Pawnee City."

"I'll keep an eye peeled," the marshal said agreeably. "But

suppose you start for the prairie right now. I don't want you sleeping in Pawnee City—unless it's down at the calaboose."

Jethro rubbed his face which had received a considerable massage. He said to Bokker, "Be seein' you." He half saluted Paul Shay, but gave the marshal only a dirty look before he left the saloon.

The marshal looked at Shay, then at Bokker. "Didn't take you long to get in trouble."

Paul Shay chuckled. "It wasn't any trouble."

The marshal nodded and walked to the bar, where he ordered a glass of beer. Shay indicated the law man. "What's his name?"

"Tom Chaffee," volunteered the faro dealer. "And I'll give you some free advice—don't tangle with him."

"Chaffee's only the dep'ty," grinned a bystander. "If you want real trouble, take on Fletch Trow, the Marshal."

"Fletcher Trow?" exclaimed Phil Bokker.

"Yep," was the reply. "Fletch is a real curly wolf." The man winked at Bokker. "They say he used to ride with Charley Quantrell and Bloody Bill Anderson."

Bokker strode away from the faro game. He found Chaffee, the deputy marshal, with his back to the bar, looking over a half-emptied glass of beer.

"Where'll I find Fletcher Trow?" Bokker asked.

"Down at his office, I expect."

"Where's that?"

"Two-story log house on the corner of Kiowa Street. The calaboose is in back."

Bokker nodded his thanks and headed for the door. Outside, he looked to the right and left. The one cross street in the town was some hundred feet from the hotel. A two-story building, built like a blockhouse, stood diagonally across the street. Bokker crossed.

Fletcher Trow sat in a straight-backed chair, tilted back against the wall. He was a lean man of about thirty-one or two. There was a sardonic droop to the right side of his mouth.

"Trow?" Bokker asked abruptly as he entered.

Trow pushed back his flat-crowned Stetson, but showed no unusual interest. "You'll be Phil Bokker?"

Bokker's eyes narrowed. "You know me?"

"Been expectin' you." Trow made a slight gesture. "I had a letter."

"From Raytown?"

"I don't rightly remember."

"And you don't remember who wrote the letter?"

"Can't say I do."

"I don't imagine, then, that I'm going to get much information from you."

"Depends on what information you want. I'm a public official of Pawnee City. Anything you want to know about the town I'll tell you. I'll be glad to explain our laws to you."

"Your deputy already explained those."

Trow smiled thinly. "Chaffee? Good man, Chaffee."

Bokker said, carefully, "Do the people in this town know you rode with Quantrell?"

"Quantrell? Who's he?"

"Yesterday," Bokker told Fletcher Trow icily, "I talked to a man from Lawrence. Six years ago he was hiding under the sidewalk, across from the Eldridge House. He saw what went on."

"So?"

"He can identify you."

"His word against mine." The marshal brought the front legs of his chair down to the floor and got to his feet. "Ever hear of the word amnesty?"

"Every man who committed a crime during the war hides behind the word," Bokker said angrily. "But Kansas was a Union state. They still don't like Rebels. How'd you ever become marshal?"

"The job was open and the mayor offered it to me. I guess he thought I had the qualifications for it. I'm fairly handy with a gun."

"You've had enough practice!"

Trow waggled a forefinger at Bokker. "Let's don't get personal, Bokker. There's no United States Army here to back you up. Just the local law, that's all. And that's me."

The street door opened and Tom Chaffee came in.

"——and my deputy, Tom Chaffee," Trow added.

"He had a little trouble down at the hotel, marshal," Chaffee offered. "I could have brought him in."

"Anything serious?"

Chaffee hesitated. "No, but it could be, if you wanted it to be."

"Never mind, Tom. Mr. Bokker thinks he knows me from the war. Thinks I was with him and Quantrell——"

Bokker exclaimed, "*I* wasn't with Quantrell!"

Trow shrugged. "If you say so, Bokker. You see how those things get around? People even say *I* was with Quantrell."

"You were."

"Like I was saying, Bokker," Trow continued, "everybody was in the war and everybody talks about it. You can't tell the truth from a lie any more. Privates make themselves captains, captains generals. Why, a fella told me only the other day *he* won the battle of Gettysburg. Man from Georgia takes a trip up north these days and everybody calls him a bushwhacker and robber. They say the same thing about Sherman's boys down in Georgia. Just talk. Don't mean a thing. People say you rode with Quantrell. Hell, they say the same thing about me. And Tom Chaffee."

"Not me," said Chaffee. "I wore a regular blue uniform."

"And maybe I wore a gray? What's the difference? The war's over. Forget it."

"I can't," said Bokker. "People won't let me. My picture appeared in a magazine——"

"So did mine."

"But you were there and I wasn't. There's a difference."

"Is there, Bokker? Some fellows over in Clay Country rode with Quantrell. So they tell me, anyway. Well, *they* became outlaws. *I* became a marshal."

"Take that marshal's badge," Bokker said, "put it on the outside of your coat and ride into Lawrence. See what'll happen."

"Nothing will happen. Because I'm not going to Lawrence," Trow said calmly. "I've got no business there. I've got no business in Kalamazoo, or in Kewanee, Illinois. Or a lot of other places."

"We've got business here," interposed Tom Chaffee. "Enough to keep us going day and night. Keepin' the Texas boys from takin' over Pawnee City."

The marshal nodded agreement. "And it's about time we started making the rounds." He adjusted the holster that held a long-barreled Navy revolver. "Care to come along, Bokker?"

Bokker shook his head and left the marshal's office.

He walked back to the hotel, but had no desire to go back into the saloon. He climbed to the second floor. He noted the absence of a chink of light under the door of Ruth Compton's room and went to the room he was to share with Paul Shay.

He undressed and went to bed and then could not sleep.

There was too much on his mind, too much noise came through the thin floor that separated the sleeping rooms from the saloon below. After a long time he dozed off and was awakened by a louder than usual commotion below.

It was quieted after a while and he was barely asleep when Paul Shay came in with a lighted candle. Bokker kept his eyes closed and Shay muttered and stumbled about the room. He finally crowded into the bed with Bokker and the latter was assailed by the whiskey fumes on Shay's breath. He finally slept, however.

TWELVE

Shay was dressing when Bokker awoke. Shay's eyes were clear, his hand was steady. "What a town!" he chuckled as he saw Bokker awake.

"You like this kind of life?" Bokker asked, putting his feet to the floor.

"You can't say it's dull! Busted one day, flush the next." Shay scooped up a double handful of money from the washstand on which he had heaped it. "I won back the seven hundred I lost on the train and three hundred profit." He began counting money. "Here—take half of it."

"Just the hundred I loaned you."

"If you hadn't given me the hundred, I wouldn't have won this," protested Shay. "You're entitled to half."

"I only want the hundred."

Shay shrugged. "Have it your way. Well, go back to sleep. No need of your getting up."

"I'm an early riser. It's after six o'clock."

"Only reason I'm up is that there's a trail herd coming in this morning. I want a chance to buy it. However, since you're up, let's get something to eat."

Bokker was already dressing and a few minutes later they left the little room. In the narrow hall, Shay nodded toward Ruth's room. "No use waking her."

They descended to the lobby and crossed the street to the restaurant. In spite of the early hour there were six or eight customers already in the place.

The menu was scrawled on a slate hanging behind the counter: *Breakfast, Hot Cakes, Ham, Eggs, Coffee. 50 Cents.* "We'll have it," said Shay to the bleary-eyed waiter. "And don't slice the ham too thin. Also, I like my hot cakes big."

He turned to Bokker. "I almost forgot—you found Fletcher Trow last night. How'd you make out with him?"

"I didn't. He was less talkative than the Raytown people."

"A man isn't going to talk himself onto a scaffold." Shay frowned. "I almost followed you last night. To tell you that Fletcher Trow is not a man to mix with."

"I talked to him. He can take care of himself."

"Did you hear how he became marshal of Pawnee City?"

Bokker shook his head.

"The Burke Brothers from Texas, who were real bad medicine, took over the town one day about six months ago. They killed the marshal and ran his deputy into a hole. Then they galloped up and down the street, shooting out the windows of the stores. Trow was in one of the stores. He was just passing through Pawnee City. A piece of glass hit him in the face. He went out on the street and took a shot at the older Burke brother. He winged him at a distance of over two hundred yards. Both of the Burkes then came at Trow, shooting. He put a bullet into the forehead of each. The mayor offered him the job of marshal. Trow didn't want the job, but the town council had a special meeting and made him an offer that he couldn't refuse."

"And Tom Chaffee? He was the deputy the Burke brothers ran out of town?"

"No—no. Trow brought Chaffee in. One of the conditions to taking the job. They've done great work, though. They've kept the town under control for six months—and nine marshals had the job in the year and a half before Trow took over. Four of them were killed by Texas men. The others quit—couldn't take it."

"I don't doubt that Trow knows the killing business," Bokker said testily. "He had plenty of practice during the war. And probably since."

"I don't want you to make a mistake, Phil," Shay said earnestly. "This is Trow's town. The people are behind him. You can't go up to Trow and kill him——"

"I have no intentions of killing him," Bokker retorted. "I just want him to answer one question."

"He isn't going to tell you that," Shay said, "not unless you put a gun up against his wishbone—and maybe he wouldn't talk then."

"He'll talk," said Bokker. "I'll make him."

Shay's forehead creased. "You're my friend, Bokker. I'd hate to see you wind up in the Pawnee City Boot Hill."

A man at the far end of the counter paid for his breakfast and started for the door. Then he saw Paul Shay and stopped.

"Didn't think you'd be up this early."

Shay grinned. "I don't let my pleasure interfere with business. I figure to buy Winston's herd. Phil, shake hands

with Clem Foster. *He's* figuring on buying the Winston beef."

"If it's prime," Foster corrected as he shook hands with Bokker, "and if the price is right."

"It'll have to be more than I can pay. That reminds me, I've got to see about my bank draft, Phil. You eat my breakfast. I'll have a double one later. See you, Foster."

Shay got up and went out of the resturant. Foster remained behind. He shook his head as the door closed on Shay. "Quite a man, your friend. I didn't think he'd be up and around this morning, the way he was putting it away last night."

"Paul and I had beds next to each other at the hospital, six years ago," said Bokker. "I hadn't seen him since until yesterday."

"The company he's working for is new," Foster went on, "but I've an idea that Shay's going to do all right for them." He paused. "Unless he stubs his toe."

He nodded to Bokker and left the resturant.

The two orders of breakfast came; Bokker finished his own and ate the ham from Shay's but was compelled to leave the rest. He paid for both meals, however. When he left the restaurant, Shay was riding out of a livery stable, leading a second saddled horse.

"Feel like a ride out on the prairie?" Shay called.

"I haven't had a horse between my legs in months," declared Bokker with pleasure. He sized up the animal, a rangy bay. He nodded in approval. "They've got good horseflesh out here."

"Let's ride," said Shay, handing the reins to Bokker. He sent his horse down the street at a swift run. Bokker mounted and set out after Shay.

He had difficulty catching up to his friend. Shay was an easy, smooth rider. He had apparently spent much time on a horse.

A wooden toll bridge spanned a river at the south end of the street. Shay tossed the bridge tender a quarter without stopping or even slackening his speed. Bokker came along and also tossed the man a coin.

A hundred yards south of the river, Foster, the cattle buyer, was jogging along on a black gelding. Shay slackened his speed. "Going to beat me, Foster?" he cried.

"I hate to tell you," Foster retorted, "but I bought

Winston's last two herds. He won't sell to you until I've made my offer."

Shay fell in beside Foster. "In that case, there's no hurry."

A herd of seven or eight hundred steers was spread out a half mile before the three riders. Two or three cowboys rode slowly around the fringes of the herd, keeping it compact. A half-dozen other cowboys were gathered around the chuck wagon.

Foster, Bokker and Shay rode up to the chuck wagon.

A huge Texan left the group. "Thought you'd be out bright and early, Foster."

"I had to get up early to beat my friend here," Foster said. "He's with the——"

"Midwest Livestock Company," cried Paul Shay. "Our packing house is in Chicago and we can give you a better price than any of the Kansas City outfits." He grinned at Foster.

"If you can beat Foster's price," Winston said, "you've got yourself eight hundred of the best Longhorns that ever came up from Texas."

"The best?" asked Shay. He indicated the herd. "Look kind of poor to me."

"Then you don't want my beef."

"Oh, I want it, all right. But there's no use fooling ourselves. That stock is thin and the price has got to be a little thin."

"Mister," said Winston, "if you traveled seven hundred miles, you'd be thin yourself. A couple of weeks grazing will fatten them up into fine beef."

"All right," said Shay, "you keep them here, fatten them up and in two weeks I'll give you thirty dollars a head."

"Can't," retorted Winston. "I've got to get back to Texas with my boys and bring another herd up before fall. We can stay two days in Pawnee City, that's all." He turned to Foster. "What can you pay, Foster—right now, today?"

"Twenty-five dollars a head."

"I was hoping to get thirty. In fact, my partners back home said they wouldn't be satisfied with less."

"Let me look at them," said Foster. He turned his horse and rode it toward the outskirts of the herd. Winston followed afoot, but Shay, winking at Bokker, remained on his horse near the chuck wagon.

"We're going to have some company," he said, nodding in the general direction of Pawnee City.

Bokker turned and saw two horses bearing down upon the Winston camp. As they came nearer he saw that both riders were well-dressed city men.

"Cattle buyers," said Shay.

Foster returned from the herd as the new men rode up. He nodded to them. "Eight hundred head," he said. "I've given my top price—twenty-five dollars."

Winston came up. "How are you, Mr. Peabody—Mr. Cartwright?"

The men returned his greeting.

"I'll go twenty-six dollars," one of the men said, "delivery in two weeks."

"You got to take delivery today," cried Winston. "I just told these men that I've got to get back to Texas in a hurry if I want to bring up another herd this year."

The second new arrival shook his head. "I just stopped at the depot. They can't get any cars for two weeks. I'll go twenty-seven fifty, delivery in two weeks."

Foster showed sudden concern. "What's this about no cars for two weeks?"

"That's what the Kansas-Pacific man said twenty minutes ago."

"There's a string of empties on the siding right now!" cried Foster.

"Reserved," said the first cattle buyer. "Meeker says it's got to be first come, these days."

Foster turned back to Winston. "I'm sorry, Steve, if I can't get cars, I can't take the herd. It's impossible to get any herders in Pawnee City. Unless your boys can stay here two weeks, I'll have to pass up the herd."

Crestfallen, Winston turned to Shay. "What's your price—delivery today?"

"Twenty dollars," Shay replied laconically.

"Twenty dollars!" cried Winston, in consternation. "That's robbery."

"It sure is," agreed Shay, "but how many steers do you think I'll lose in two weeks? Every Pawnee in fifty miles'll get himself some free beef. Not to mention some white Pawnees from the town yonder."

Winston shook his head. "I can't stay here two weeks. I

promised my partners I'd be back right away. Foster—I'll take your twenty-five dollars a head if you take the herd today."

"I can't. Shay's right. Without anyone to watch the herd, I'd lose half of it."

"I'm willing to take a gamble," Shay said. "I'll make it . . . twenty-one dollars."

Winston groaned. He looked at the other two cattle buyers. "Any better offers?"

Both men shook their heads. Winston turned back to Shay. "You've got yourself a herd," he said bitterly.

Shay reached into his pocket. "Here's five hundred dollars earnest money. As against eight hundred steers——"

"Eight hundred, more or less."

"More or less," agreed Shay, "but not too many less."

"It's robbery," exclaimed Winston, "but it's a deal."

"Drive 'em in to Pawnee City," Shay said, "to the loading-pens."

"What's the use of that?" asked Winston. "If you can't get any cars?"

"I've got cars," Shay declared cheerfully. "Enough for this herd and a few over." He grinned. "I'm the man who reserved them."

Winston let out a howl. "Why, you lyin', double-crossin' son of a thievin' Yank, you said you couldn't get any cars for two weeks."

"I said nothing of the kind," Shay retorted. "I said I'd take a gamble." He indicated the other cattle buyers. "They said they couldn't get cars for two weeks."

"I won't sell," cried Winston. "Here—take back your dirty five hundred——"

"You made a deal," snapped Shay. "These men are witnesses."

Winston appealed to Foster and the others. "Was it a deal?"

Foster hesitated, then nodded. "It was, but not the kind of deal I'd make . . ." He turned his horse and rode away. The other cattle buyers followed him.

Winston glowered at Shay. "All right, I said it was a deal and I'll let it stand. But you're not going to get any more cattle from me. And I'm going to be tellin' about this to some of the other Texas cattle drivers."

"You tell them," Shay said coldly, "and tell them also that I've got money to put on the barrelhead for good Texas beef.

Now, if you'll drive this herd into town, I'll have your money for you at the bank."

He gave Winston a half salute and turned his horse. Bokker fell in beside him. They rode in silence for a little while, then Shay said, "You didn't like that deal?"

Bokker shrugged. "How you buy cattle is none of my concern."

"They'd cheat me if they had the chance," Shay said testily. "I'm new here—I've got to get up earlier and be just a little sharper than the other fellows." He nodded vigorously. "I think I'm going to like Pawnee City. It's my kind of town."

Bokker made no response. Shay rode beside him in silence for a few yards, then exclaimed, "What're you going to do, Phil?"

"I have no plans—except to make Fletcher Trow talk."

"That's going to take some doing. I've been thinking, this other man, MacDonald Pierson . . . you said he was in Texas."

"They told me that in Raytown. I don't know if I can believe it or not."

"If he's in Texas, he's in a mighty big place. Here, at least you've got Fletcher Trow. He may talk and he may not. On the other hand, a good many Texans come up The Trail with cattle. Your Pierson is as likely to come as not. Trow's here and if Pierson comes, he'll be in touch with him."

"I've already thought of that."

"Have you also thought of settling down here? You've got to be doing something. You're a lawyer and I understand there's only one lawyer in town and he's the county prosecutor. He doesn't have too much time for private practice. Right now I need a bill of sale made out for me. I want it down in black and white the price I paid, the number of cattle."

"I'll make it out for you." A thoughtful expression came to Bokker's eyes.

In Pawnee City they went to the bank where Shay introduced himself to Josh Chandler, the banker. While they discussed their business, Bokker got some paper from the teller and wrote out a bill of sale in duplicate.

When Shay finished his business with the banker, Bokker handed him the bills of sale.

"Here," said Shay, "here's your fee." He tried to thrust a double eagle on Bokker.

Bokker shook his head. "Forget it, Paul."

"No," said Shay, "it's got to be strictly business between us."

Bokker hesitated. "All right, but a dollar's enough."

"The best lawyer," said Shay, "is the one who charges the highest fees. Five for making out a bill of sale is little enough."

Bokker accepted five dollars.

They left the bank and met Ruth Compton crossing the sidewalk to climb the three-stair flight of steps into the bank.

"I'm in business," she said. "I've bought a half interest in Mrs. Melcher's Bon Ton Millinery Shop."

"That's great," enthused Paul Shay, "but it's no good unless Phil draws up your contract."

Ruth smiled brightly at Bokker. "I was going to ask if you'd mind making out some kind of paper."

"I'll go with you to Mrs. Melcher's right now."

"I'll meet you there in ten minutes. I've got to cash a bank draft first."

"Good," said Bokker.

"I made a little business deal myself," said Shay. "Breakfast is on me. Suppose we all get together at the restaurant in a half hour."

THIRTEEN

Shay went off to return the horses to the livery stable where he had rented them. Bokker returned to the hotel and waited some ten minutes in the lobby, then strolled to Mrs. Melcher's Bon Ton Millinery Shop, a store some ten by fifteen feet in size.

Mrs. Melcher was a stout, redheaded woman, crowding forty. The store contained a modest assortment of hats, most of them gaudy creations of velvet, satin and silk. Ruth Compton had apparently just entered the store and was counting out bills onto the counter.

She stopped to introduce Bokker. "Mrs. Melcher, this is Mr. Bokker. He's agreed to draw up a contract——"

"A simple partnership agreement," Bokker corrected.

Mrs. Melcher regarded Bokker dubiously. "I didn't think we needed no lawyers in this."

"It's always best to have a lawyer draw up business papers," Bokker said. "A contract protects both parties."

Mrs. Melcher hesitated. "How much'll it cost me?"

"Nothing, Mrs. Melcher," Ruth said quickly.

"I'm representing Miss Compton," Bokker went on. "I think, therefore, that you ought to have your own attorney, Mrs. Melcher."

"Ain't no other in Pawnee City."

"Isn't the county prosecutor also engaged in private practice?"

"Mike Huntley?" Mrs. Melcher sniffed. "I wouldn't trust him to make out nothing. Spends most of his time in the saloons, playing cards." She looked at Bokker suspiciously. "When do I get my money?"

"I've already counted it out, Mrs. Melcher," said Ruth. "Here it is, five hundred dollars."

"For half of the business?"

"That's right."

With the money actually in her hands, Mrs. Melcher got pen and paper and Bokker seated himself at the counter and

wrote out a simple partnership agreement. Mrs. Melcher read it twice and was still reluctant to sign it, but—fingering the five hundred dollars—finally did so.

"Well, Miss Compton," Bokker said then, "you're in business."

"And so are you," Ruth Compton said. "I'd like to pay you your fee."

"No," Bokker replied promptly. "This one is free."

"I insist—please!"

Bokker hesitated, saw that Ruth was serious and finally nodded. "Very well, then, I'll charge you the same as I charged Paul Shay for making out his bill of sale—five dollars."

She paid him the money. "Now let's have that party with Paul."

Bokker hesitated. "I've had my breakfast."

She looked at him sharply, but made no comment until they were out of the millinery shop. Then she said, "What's happened between you and Paul?"

"Nothing," Bokker replied a little too quickly. "Nothing at all. It's just—well, if I'm going to hang out my shingle here in Pawnee City, I think I'd better look around for office space."

She nodded. "Very well."

He watched her start across the street, then turned back toward the hotel. In the lobby, he found the hotel proprietor, Joe Wilkins, scowling over his register. "Morning, sir," he greeted Bokker. "Uh—I'm just looking over the room situation. Two trail herds are coming in either today or tomorrow and I've got a couple of telegraph reservations for rooms. Uh—could you tell me how long you expect to keep your room?"

"I couldn't say," Bokker replied. "You see, I'm thinking of settling in Pawnee City for a while."

Wilkins looked at him narrowly. "What for? You're not a gambler."

"I'm a lawyer."

"But we got a lawyer!"

Bokker shrugged. "There may be enough legal business in Pawnee City for two lawyers."

"Mike Huntley don't have enough to keep him busy."

Bokker said coolly, "I just stopped in to ask if you knew of a small office that I might rent."

"Be damned," muttered Wilkins. Then he shrugged. "Might be fun, at that. Yes, Mr. Bokker, I know just the place—Simon Maxwell's got a room next to his barbershop that he wants to rent. Right across from the jail. Make it handy for you. Be near your customers."

"Thank you," said Bokker and left the hotel.

He found Maxwell shaving a customer. "Sure," he said, "I got a room to rent. Here's the key, take a look at it. Right next door."

Bokker took the key, left the barbershop and went next door. It was an unpainted addition, more of a lean-to affair, attached to the barbershop. The front window had four panes, three of which were broken. Bokker unlocked the squeaking door and found himself in a room some ten by ten feet in size. A partition shut off a tiny room at the rear.

He returned to the barber. "How much?"

"How much can you spare?"

"Twenty dollars a month, on a six-month lease——"

"Lease? What's a lease?"

"An agreement that you'll let me have the place for that long a period."

"Oh, you can have it, all right. That is, as long as you pay your rent."

"If I don't, you can evict me. Have you got a sheet of paper?"

The barber rummaged around and found paper and a pen. He watched dubiously as Bokker wrote out a brief form. He read it, when Bokker handed it to him.

"Sounds just like a lawyer wrote it."

"I am a lawyer."

"Huh? Be damned!"

"If you'll sign, Mr. Maxwell, I'll pay you your first month's rent."

The barber signed the lease and Bokker handed him the money. The barber then showed some concern.

"I hope I done the right thing," he said. "I been shavin' Mr. Mike Huntley three times a week for the past six months."

"I'll let you shave me every day, instead of only three times a week."

The barber brightened.

In The St Louis General Store, Bokker bought a small cot, a washstand, pitcher and bowl and two chairs. He asked about

a desk, but finding they had none, settled for a kitchen table. He had the stuff delivered to his new office, then sought out a sign painter and a man to install new glass in the windows.

Toward noon Bokker was straightening out his office, while the sign painter was lettering on his newly installed windows:

Philip Bokker
Lawyer

A fleshy, red-faced man, wearing a rusty Prince Albert and a black felt hat, stepped into the office.

"I'm your competitor," he said.

Bokker started to hold out his hand, saw that Huntley had no intentions of extending his own.

"How are you, Mr. Huntley?" he said quietly.

"How long do you think you can hold out?" Huntley asked unpleasantly.

"Quite a while," retorted Bokker.

"You'll be leavin' before the month's out."

"Don't count on it.'

"Want to bet?"

"No. I sit in a sociable poker game once in a while, but that's the only gambling I do. Same for drinking."

"It's going to be like that, eh?" snapped Huntley.

"It's going to be whatever you make it, Huntley."

"All right, Bokker, I tried to warn you. Don't say I didn't."

"You did!"

Huntley stamped out of the little office.

The sign painter came in, grinning. "That's fifty cents, Mr. Bokker."

"Thanks; here's your money. It's a good job."

"Our prosecutor don't like competition," the man continued. "Couldn't help hearing him."

"I'm sorry he feels that way."

"Oh, don't let it worry you. Well, not too much. Huntley's in with the mayor and his crowd, but Judge Paisley ain't payin' much attention to Huntley. He's a pretty square man."

Bokker nodded in satisfaction. "A lawyer can't ask for more than an honest judge."

He left the office and had lunch at the restaurant. Returning to his office, he was hailed by the barber.

"Mr. Bokker," the barber said unhappily, "I made a mistake. I shouldn't have rented you the place."

"Why not?"

"Well, business is good and I been thinkin' I might have to tear down the wall between the two places and put in another chair."

"You can do that," Bokker said, "in six months when my lease expires."

The barber winced. "Is that what that paper was for? I—I can't make you move?"

"That's right. Of course, if you want to go to court——"

"No, no, I don't want to go into any court," the barber said hastily. "Uh—what if I gave you your twenty dollars back and—and ten dollars to boot?"

"No," said Bokker. "I rented your place in good faith and I'm going to keep it. Tell Mr. Huntley that, will you?"

"Huntley? What's Huntley got to do with this?"

"Isn't he the one who changed your mind?"

The barber's forehead creased in worry. "N-no," he said. Then he turned back into his shop.

Ten minutes later Tom Chaffee crossed the street. He stood for a moment or two looking at the new lettering on the window, then opened the door and stood in the doorway.

"Going to do some lawing?"

"If I can get clients."

"Oh, we got plenty of crime in Pawnee City. On'y most of the people just up and plead guilty and pay the fine—if they can. If they can't, we keep 'em in the calaboose awhile. I s'pose you'll be comin' around now and tellin' the prisoners not to plead guilty?"

"No," said Bokker.

"How else you goin' to get customers?"

"In the way reputable lawyers get them."

"You a reputable lawyer?"

Bokker looked narrowly at the deputy. "The marshal sent you over?"

Chaffee grinned. "I do lots of things by myself. You'd be surprised." He gave Bokker a half salute and turned away. He did not cross the street to the jail.

Bokker frowned at the door, then got up and went out. He walked to the hotel, went up to the room he had shared for one night with Paul Shay and got his valise.

He descended to the lobby and found Wilkins, the hotel man, coming out of the saloon. "I'm giving up my share of the room, Mr. Wilkins."

"Don't do me much good. Shay's staying." His eyes went to the saloon door. "The way he's going he may be owning the hotel before long."

Bokker set down his valise and walked into the saloon. The space in front of the bar was vacant, but at least twenty customers were crowded around a table. Looking between two of the watchers, Bokker saw that Paul Shay was seated in the poker game. Also playing was Charles Templeton, the gambler from the train.

Two of the other players were faro dealers. A fifth player was obviously a cattleman. Shay had a considerable amount of money before him and was counting out a hundred dollars to add to the large amount already in the center of the table.

"I raise her a hundred," he said calmly.

One of the gamblers threw in his hand. "Too much for me."

The cattleman, however, called, as did Templeton.

"Three kings," said Shay, turning up his cards.

Templeton exclaimed, "On a four-card draw!"

The cattleman groaned. "Never saw such a lucky man."

"I wasn't so lucky on the train yesterday," Shay said cheerfully.

Templeton glowered at Shay. "You've made a couple of remarks about the train, Shay. You leadin' up to something?"

Shay pointed to one of the faro dealers. "Tell him what you said to Mister Jethro last night."

The gambler frowned. "I don't know anyone named Jethro."

"Oh, sure you do. You know—the fake buffalo hunter you threw out of the game."

"Mr. Shay," said the faro dealer. "I don't go looking for trouble."

"Say your piece," snarled Templeton suddenly.

"I lost seven hundred dollars on the train yesterday," Shay said.

"I lost money myself!"

"To your partner? The fake buffalo hunter . . ."

Templeton kicked back his chair, started to his feet. His right hand darted under the left lapel of his coat. Shay

brought a gun up from under the table, where he had already been holding it in his hand.

"Draw, Templeton," he invited.

Templeton's hand came slowly back into sight. "You—you win, Shay!" he said hoarsely.

"You admit Jethro was your partner?"

Templeton made no reply, but his eyes threatened to pop from his head.

"I asked you a question," Shay pursued.

"Y-yes," conceded Templeton.

"Jethro left town last night," Shay went on, remorselessly. "I suggest you leave today."

Templeton started to gather up the money on the table in front of him, but Shay made a gesture with his revolver. Templeton turned, leaving the money on the table. He walked stiffly out of the room.

"Now," said Shay, "let's continue the game."

"I'm sorry," said one of the faro dealers. "I need some sleep." He gathered up his money.

The cattleman stowed away his money. "I got to look after my herd."

Shay smiled thinly. "I guess I've got business to look after, too."

Shay got together his winnings. The crowd around the table disintegrated and then Shay looked up and saw Bokker.

"Oh, hello, Phil."

"Hello, Paul. I just dropped in to tell you that I've moved out of the room."

Shay regarded him sharply. "Why?"

"I rented an office and there's a small room in back of it. I've got to save money."

Shay seemed relieved. "Oh." He got up from the table. "Help yourself," he pointed to Templeton's money. "Twenty-some dollars of that is yours."

Bokker shook his head.

Shay grunted. "You're a hard man to figure out, Phil. You'd kill a man, but you're squeamish about little things. All right, you do it your way and I'll do it mine."

"That's good enough," Bokker said stiffly.

He walked out of the saloon. In the lobby he retrieved his bag and carried it down to his office.

FOURTEEN

Bokker was making up his bed toward the middle of the afternoon, when he heard the street door open. He stepped into the "office" and was surprised to see Ruth Compton.

"Curiosity got the best of me," she said. "Paul told me you'd opened an office."

Bokker made a small sweeping gesture to include the meager furnishings. "This is it. I sleep in the back room."

"That's what I'm doing at the shop," she said. "I'll need a good sleep tonight. I don't think I slept five minutes last night, with all the clatter and noise in the hotel." She paused. "I sold a hat."

"Just one?"

"Mrs. Melcher says some days she doesn't sell anything. Then, when a big trail herd comes, she may sell twelve or fifteen hats in a single day."

"A trail herd's here today," Bokker said, then added, "Paul Shay bought it."

"He told me. He—he also said you didn't approve of the way he bought it."

"Paul's business is none of my concern."

"I thought you two were old friends."

"We were in the hospital together, six years ago. We had beds next to each other. For about three weeks. I never saw him again until yesterday." Bokker paused. "I know very little about the man, what he did before the war, or since."

A little frown creased her forehead. "You've quarreled."

"It wasn't a quarrel."

"But you don't like him?"

Bokker made no reply for a moment, then suddenly shot at her, "You do." It was as much a question as a statement.

She replied without hesitation, "He's interesting. You never know what he's going to say—or do." She paused. "He told me about your—your trouble."

Anger swept Bokker. "He doesn't miss a trick, does he?"

"I don't think I know what you mean."

"He gives you *his* version of his own affairs—and there's nothing to them, the way he puts them. But the other man's——"

"No," Ruth said quickly. "He didn't make you out any villain. I—I understand your trouble."

"Do you?"

"Someone's done something terrible to you. It's only natural that you want revenge."

Bokker shook his head. "I'm not seeking vengeance. It's hard to explain."

"Why? Someone wronged you and you want to bring him to—to justice. Isn't that what you're trying to do?"

"No," Bokker said, "it's not as simple as that. I saw a lot of war. I saw things happen that were not right. And yet they weren't wrong. It was war. What Quantrell and his men did in Lawrence wasn't war. It wasn't right by any conceivable standards, by any rules of civilization. They looted and destroyed an entire town—they murdered almost two hundred men; they made a hundred and fifty widows and twice that many orphans. It was murder, murder of the foulest kind. The men who committed it should be made to pay for their crimes."

"You think every man who was with Quantrell should be executed?" exclaimed Ruth.

"No. Quantrell had over four hundred men with him. A good many had no idea of what was going to happen in Lawrence. They thought they were going into a battle—a raid at worst. They took no part in the looting and—and the murdering. But some of the men did. And they apparently enjoyed it, if the reports of the surviving witnesses are correct."

Ruth regarded Bokker steadily. "And it's your duty—your mission, rather, to find these—these murderers and kill them?"

Bokker exhaled wearily. "Is that what you think I'm doing?"

"Isn't it?"

"Wait!"

Bokker strode into the tiny bedroom, opened his valise and took out his worn copy of *Fred Cowan's Illustrated Weekly*. He returned to the front room and plopped the opened magazine on the table that served as his desk.

"Look at that picture."

Ruth bent over it. "It's—it's rather vivid."

"Look at the faces of Quantrell, Bloody Bill Anderson——"

"Here's your picture!"

"What do you think? Is it a good likeness?"

She stared at the picture, then turned to look full into Bokker's face. She was frowning. "It's—I just said, 'vivid.'"

"If I ever looked like that," Bokker said slowly, "I ought to be killed in the next moment. The man who has my face——"

"He seems to be enjoying what he's doing."

"Now you've got it!" exclaimed Bokker.

"But Paul says you can prove you weren't at Lawrence."

"I wasn't there, but someone was—someone who killed a man just like that and whose face the artist caught—'vividly,' as you say. So vividly that the real owner of the face wanted to remove himself from the scene of the crime. He did it by erasing his own face and putting in another. Mine."

"Wouldn't that be—rather difficult?"

"Not to a good artist."

"But he'd have to have possession of the original drawing, wouldn't he?"

"Yes. But there'd have been no difficulty about it if he'd been with Quantrell when this original sketch was found on the body of the dead artist. A half hour's work with a pencil—maybe only ten minutes—would have been enough."

"But he would have had to know you."

"He knew me."

"Who?"

"The man who changed the picture. No, I don't know his name. Not yet. When I find it out, I'm sure it'll turn out to be someone I know. Who . . . I haven't the slightest idea."

"And *when* you find out?"

"I'm going to kill him."

Ruth exclaimed poignantly, "But you've just spent ten minutes convincing me that you're not looking for revenge."

"I'm not. A man who did what this man in the picture did, a man who'd do such a thing and enjoy it, has no right to live."

"And you think *you* have the right to kill him?"

"No one else can kill him."

"What about the law? You're a lawyer."

"The law won't get this man. He's received legal amnesty. No one can touch him—no one, but myself."

"I think," Ruth Compton said slowly, "I think I'm beginning to dislike you."

She turned and started for the door. But before she reached it, a gun boomed out upon the street. It was a heavy, dull boom, not the report of a revolver.

Ruth gasped and took a quick step back. The gun boomed again. Then a loud yell came over. "Come on out!" the voice yelled piercingly. "Come on out and fight, you cheap tinhorn!"

Bokker grasped Ruth's arm, propelled her away from the door. "Keep back!"

He whipped open the door and stepped out onto the wooden sidewalk.

A man in buckskin sat a horse some fifty yards away. He was reloading a double-barreled shotgun. Even as he snapped the gun together, the doors of a saloon bellied outwards and Paul Shay stepped out.

Two doors away, Charles Templeton, a revolver in his hand, stepped from a doorway. He thrust out his hand, pointing the revolver at Paul Shay.

"Look out, Paul!" cried Bokker.

Shay had been moving out toward the hitchrail to get a better shot at the man on horseback, Jethro, the buffalo hunter-gambler. Attracted by Bokker's call, he whirled. He was caught between two fires, which he realized instantly. The blast of the shotgun, less than forty feet away, could cut him in two. And if he took time to shoot at Jethro, Templeton's bullet would cut him down.

Shay did the best thing he could do. He threw himself forward and down, under the hitchrail. Jethro's gun blasted, the buckshot going all around Shay, who was in no position to turn and get Templeton. Templeton made a quick step forward, depressed his aim.

Bokker's gun was in his hand. It roared and Templeton cried out and pitched forward, the gun falling from his hand. Shay sized up the situation instantly. He came to his feet in a lunge, thrust forward and fired at Jethro, just as the latter was throwing down for his second shot.

Shay's aim was bad, too hasty. Jethro's horse took the bullet. It screamed in anguish, reared up and went over backwards. Jethro slipped from the horse, hit the dust of the

street. The shotgun was jolted from his hand. He dove for it.

Shay's second shot caught him, bent over the shotgun. He collapsed over the gun.

Shay walked out to the middle of the street, looked down at the dead man.

Bokker passed Templeton, saw that he, too, was dead and continued on out to the street.

"Thanks," said Shay.

Tom Chaffee came running, gun in hand.

"All right," he cried, "drop it!"

Shay looked at him, then down at the gun in his hand. "They tried to kill me."

"You can tell that to the judge," Chaffee said grimly. "Now, drop your gun. You, too, Bokker!"

Bokker dropped his revolver to the street. Shay, however, held his.

"Now wait a minute, Marshal. I was only defending myself."

"Drop it, Shay!" snapped Chaffee. "Drop it—or shoot!"

Men were coming out of stores, into the street. Fletcher Trow was running forward. Shay dropped his gun and held his hands, shoulder height, palms outward.

"I should have taken them in last night," Chaffee said to his superior.

Fletcher Trow stooped and caught up Shay's gun, then moved and picked up Bokker's. "Now you'll find out about law," he said to Bokker. "Pawnee City law."

"They would have killed Shay," Bokker protested.

"Sure, sure," Trow said easily. "Last night you and him ganged up on this one," indicating Jethro, "and today you crowded the other one." He nodded toward Templeton's body. "What did you expect them to do? Buy you a horse and buggy?"

Huntley, the prosecuting attorney, strode forward. "Lock them up, Marshal," he snapped. "I'll sign the complaint."

"You heard him," Trow said, pointing toward the jail. "Let's get going."

Paul Shay glowered at the marshal. "I'll say my piece to the judge," he promised.

Bokker and Shay marched to the jail with the marshal and his deputy crowding on their heels. In the marshal's office, Trow opened a door leading to the jail proper.

This consisted of two cells, with a narrow aisle between

them. The cells were devoid of furniture. In one of the cells a drunken cowboy lay on the floor in a stupor. Trow opened the door of the other cell.

"Make yourselves at home."

Shay and Bokker entered the cell. Trow locked the door and left the cell block.

Shay exclaimed, "I thought they couldn't put a lawyer in jail!"

"They can, if a lawyer kills a man," Bokker retorted grimly.

"You saved my life. Templeton would have got me."

"And now, maybe, Fletcher Trow will get me."

"They got to give us a trial," Shay declared. "Looks like you're elected to defend us."

"You may as well know," Bokker told Shay, "I had words with Huntley, the presecuting attorney."

"Oh, fine!"

"He doesn't want another lawyer in Pawnee City."

Shay snorted. "The cattle buyers didn't want another cattle buyer in town. They're afraid of competition."

"The cattle buyers didn't get us into this jam," Bokker reminded.

Shay suddenly grinned. "Things happen around me, don't they, Phil?"

"That's one way of looking at it."

They had been in jail no more than a half hour when Fletcher Trow came in from his office. "You're getting a quick trial," he said.

"Now, that's more like it!" cried Paul Shay.

"Is it?" sneered Trow. "It may mean a quick hanging."

"All we ask is a fair trial."

Trow unlocked the cell door. "Out and upstairs."

Tom Chaffee waited in the outer room, his hand resting carefully on the butt of his revolver. He followed the marshal and the prisoners out of the office and up a flight of stairs to the courtroom, which was above the jail.

FIFTEEN

Bokker was surprised when they entered the courtroom to find it jammed with Pawnee City people. Judge Paisley already sat behind his "bench," a table on a raised platform. He was in his fifties, a severe-looking man. Bokker hoped that the brief description he had received of him from the sign painter was an accurate one, for a quick glance around the room showed him only impassive, or hostile faces.

The judge looked only briefly at Shay, but his eyes came to rest upon Bokker. "You're an attorney, I understand?"

"Yes, Your Honor."

"You'll act as counsel for yourself as well as your fellow prisoner?"

"If the court permits."

"I see no objection. Prosecutor, will you read the charge?"

Huntley came forward. "The prisoners before the bar, who call themselves Paul Shay and Philip Bokker, are charged with the murder of Jed Jethro and Charles Templeton."

The judge looked at Bokker. "How do you plead?"

"Not guilty, Your Honor."

"That's ridiculous!" cried Huntley. "They were seen by a hundred witnesses."

"That will do, Prosecutor," the judge said sharply. "Mr. Bokker, you understand, of course, that you are entitled to a jury trial."

"If it please the court, we will waive a jury."

Shay looked at Bokker worriedly.

Judge Paisley said, "Will the prosecution call its first witness?"

"Deputy Marshal Chaffee!" announced Huntley.

The deputy marshal came forward and was sworn in by the marshal, who apparently doubled as bailiff.

"All right, Marshal," Huntley began, "tell the court what you saw last night at the—the hotel."

Chaffee seated himself on a chair beside the judge's desk. He fixed his eyes on Phil Bokker. "The defendants got into

a fight with the deceased, Jed Jethro. When I came up, Bokker had his gun in the—the victim's back and his partner, Shay, was threatening Jethro. They'd probably have killed him then and there if I hadn't happened to——"

"Objection, Your Honor!" exclaimed Bokker.

"Objection sustained," said the judge. "You, the witness, cannot assume what might have happened, or what was in the minds of the defendants or anyone else. You must confine yourself to stating what you actually saw."

"Why, I just told you, Judge," Chaffee said easily, "they was fixin' to kill——"

"Objection!"

"Objection sustained." Judge Paisley scowled at Chaffee. "I just got through telling you——"

"Oh, sure, Judge, sure," interrupted Chaffee.

The judge banged his gavel on the desk. "Your Honor!" he snapped. "When addressing the court."

"Sure, Your Honor. Like I was sayin', they was fixin' to——"

The gavel came down again. "Prosecutor, will you see that your witness confines himself to relating what he *knows*——"

"Your Honor," said Huntley angrily, "the witness is telling what he knows. The prisoners claim they were cheated in a card game on the train. They came to Pawnee City with the intention of attaining revenge."

Judge Paisley banged his gavel once more. "Prosecutor, you're supposed to be an attorney. Let's not have any of that from you. Once more attempt to prejudice the case and I'll dismiss the charges against the prisoners."

"Your Honor," said Huntley with studied sarcasm, "as you said, I am a lawyer. I have appeared before a great many courts. I know the customs and procedures of courts and——"

"Proceed with your case!" interrupted Judge Paisley.

"I am through with this witness!" snapped Huntley.

Chaffee started to get up, but the judge waved him back. "Counsel for defense."

"No questions at present," Bokker said.

Paul Shay exclaimed, "Are you crazy, man?"

"No questions!" repeated Bokker firmly.

"Next witness," snapped Judge Paisley.

Huntley turned, surveyed the front row of spectators. A smirk twisted his mouth.

"Steve Winston!"

Winston, the cattle drover, came forward.

Shay grabbed Bokker's arm. "Not him, Phil!"

"I can't help it," said Bokker. "He has a right to call whatever witnesses he pleases."

"He'll crucify me!"

Winston was sworn in. A sardonic grin came over his features.

"Mr. Winston," began the prosecutor, "where were you at two o'clock this afternoon?"

"I was in the hotel bar, having a glass of beer."

"What happened while you were there?"

"I heard a gun go off, outside on the street, and then a voice yelled out, "Shay, you dirty crook, come outside!"

"And then?"

"Shay," said Winston, pointing at the prisoner, "got up from a poker game. He came toward the bar and said in a loud voice, 'Jethro, that's Jethro's voice. I guess he didn't think I meant it when I told him to leave town.' "

"The prisoner, Paul Shay, said that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Did he say anything else?"

"He drew out his gun and started for the door. He said, 'I guess I'll have to kill me a man.' After that he went outside. I—I followed. Up to the door, that is. I saw the whole thing."

"Tell the court what you saw."

"I saw him shoot Jethro."

"You saw him shoot Jethro. You're sure of that?"

"Of course. He said he was going to kill Jethro and then he went and done it. Right in front of my own eyes."

"Your witness," said Huntley, turning to Bokker.

Bokker stepped up to within a few feet of the cattleman. "Mr. Winston, what is your business?"

"Business? I haven't got any business," replied the witness. "I drive cattle. You know that."

"You drive cattle," pursued Bokker. "From where?"

"Texas. Where else?"

"I don't know. I'm asking you. Very well, you drive cattle from Texas to Kansas. Your own cattle?"

"Mine and my partners'. We buy Longhorns in Texas and we sell them here."

"What do you pay for the cattle you buy?"

Winston bristled. "What business is that of yours?"

"Your Honor," Bokker appealed to the judge, "I ask that the prisoner be ordered to answer."

"Does the price he pays for cattle have any bearing on this case?"

"I think it does."

"Very well, the prisoner will answer counsel."

Winston scowled at Bokker. "What was the question?"

"I asked you what you pay for cattle in Texas."

"They ain't worth much there."

"How much?"

"Three dollars, maybe four."

"Four dollars."

"That's in Texas," said Winston, frowning. "We got to drive them six hundred miles to Pawnee City."

"Of course. Now, will you tell the court what you receive for cattle here in Pawnee City?"

"That's my business!" exclaimed Winston.

"Your Honor——" began Bokker.

Judge Paisley pointed his gavel at Winston. "Once more and I'll hold you in contempt of court. You will answer the questions of counsel."

"I protest, Your Honor," cried the prosecutor, "the price of cattle has nothing to do with the murders committed by these men——"

The gavel came down loudly and Huntley, snarling, moved back.

"Proceed," said the judge grimly.

"Isn't it a fact, Mr. Winston," Bokker proceeded, "that you sold a herd of eight hundred steers to Mr. Shay only this morning, for a price of twenty-one dollars per steer?"

"He cheated me out of four dollars a steer!"

"You *thought* he cheated you," said Bokker, "but you made the bargain of your own free will. You signed the bill of sale, did you not?"

"Yes," said Winston sullenly, "but them steers were worth——"

"Twenty-one dollars," said Bokker. "You received twenty-one dollars for steers for which you paid only four dollars. In other words, you made a profit of seventeen dollars per steer. It's true that you had to drive the steers some six hundred miles to make that profit, but you did make a profit, did you not?"

"If you call that a profit——"

"I do. You have just admitted that you believed Paul Shay cheated you. In other words, you feel badly toward Mr. Shay."

"He's a crook!"

"We'll pass that," Bokker said. "Mr. Shay is not on trial for being a crook. But you are testifying against him in a murder case . . . and you have admitted that you are prejudiced against him——" Boker paused, then said suddenly, "No more questions."

Winston got up. As he passed Bokker to resume his seat among the spectators, he gave him an angry look.

Huntley stepped up to the marshal, Fletcher Trow. He talked quickly, excitedly, although in low tones. Trow listened, then shook his head. Huntley, scowling, turned to the judge.

"The prosecution has no more witnesses. We believe that we have proved beyond doubt that the defendants——"

"*I'll* decide that," interrupted Judge Paisley. "Mr. Bokker, do you have any witnesses for the defense?"

"Just myself, Your Honor."

"Take the stand, then."

Trow moved forward and swore in Bokker. Bokker took the witness stand. "Since I am a defendant as well as counsel for myself and co-defendant, I believe it would be best if I simply told what I know about this case."

"Do it the easiest way," the judge advised.

"Mr. Shay, myself and the men who were killed today, Jethro and Templeton, engaged in a poker game on the train coming to Pawnee City yesterday," Bokker said quietly. "I dropped out of the game after losing some twenty-two dollars. Mr. Shay continued and lost seven hundred dollars. Jethro, who was dressed like a buffalo hunter—and talked of being one—was the big winner. Mr. Shay, after the game, told me that he believed Mr. Templeton and Jethro were in reality partners. However, we did not see them again on the train."

Bokker paused. "Last night, Mr. Shay was playing faro at the hotel, when the man Jethro came along. The faro dealer referred to him as a professional gambler and would not permit him in the game. Mr. Shay then had words with Jethro and Jethro reached for a gun . . . I prevented him . . ."

"How?" asked the judge.

"By drawing a gun of my own and pressing it into his back. That was all. Jethro left and I did not see him again until today. This afternoon, I again was in the hotel when

Mr. Templeton was playing cards with Mr. Shay. They had a quarrel over yesterday's game on the train. But nothing came of the quarrel. Not at the moment. Later this afternoon, I was in my office when I heard a gun go off. I also heard a voice yelling for someone to come out and fight. I stepped out of my office and saw Jethro on a horse, facing the saloon. Just then Mr. Shay stepped out. At the same time, Templeton, Jethro's partner, stepped out of a doorway, a gun in his hand. It was obvious that Jethro and Templeton had Shay between them. Both were armed and were obviously intending to kill Shay. I called out a warning to Shay and drew my own gun. I shot Mr. Templeton . . . and Shay shot Jethro."

"That's all, Mr. Bokker?"

"Yes, Your Honor."

"You may step down."

Bokker got up from the chair and resumed his position beside Paul Shay. The judge looked at the spectators, then fixed his gaze upon Bokker.

"Mr. Bokker, you are an attorney-at-law. I am surprised that you took the law into your own hands, not once, but twice."

"I had to act quickly, Your Honor," Bokker said defensively. "On both occasions. There wasn't time to appeal to the law."

"That is the mitigating circumstance," the judge continued. "Men should not be allowed to carry weapons. It leads to taking the law into their own hands. It is a regrettable circumstance, and I cannot advise too strongly that the legal arm of this city take steps to prevent citizens from carrying weapons. But since they have not done so, I cannot decide on that basis. I can only view the evidence and make my decision from it. It is quite obvious from what I have heard that the deceased, Jethro and Templeton, were intent on killing Mr. Shay. Mr. Shay had a right to defend himself. He did so. You, Mr. Bokker—you saved Mr. Shay's life. I abhor the fact of an attorney-at-law carrying weapons, but since I can do nothing about that, I can only declare that you acted within the rights of a citizen in preventing harm to another. . . . Case dismissed."

A sudden burst of applause went up in the courtroom. The judge banged his gavel on the desk once or twice, then shrugged and got to his feet.

Shay, meanwhile, had grabbed Bokker's arm. "Great, Phil —great! You did a magnificent job."

Fletcher Trow, smiling sardonically, moved up. "I shouldn't even have tried it, Bokker. But next time . . ." He smirked and turned away.

SIXTEEN

Bokker had scarcely returned to his office than Judge Paisley entered. He extended his hand.

"I want to welcome you to Pawnee City."

"Thank you, Judge."

The judge smiled. "I hope to see you often in my court. But not as a defendant."

"It wasn't of my choosing."

The judge shook his head. "That partner of yours——"

"Paul Shay isn't my partner!"

"I was under the impression that you were old friends."

"Acquaintances, Judge, But, frankly, I'm going to refuse Paul Shay's legal business from now on."

The judge regarded him quizzically. "He's a bit sharp." He held up his hand. "I heard about that cattle deal. He bribed the station agent . . ."

Bokker exclaimed, "How do you know?"

Judge Paisley shrugged. "Jenkins owed the bank three hundred dollars. He paid it off this morning."

"I should have known," exclaimed Bokker. "He was awfully sure that he would get that herd when we rode out to Winston's camp this morning." He frowned. "He had me make out the bill of sale."

"I think," the judge said, "Mr. Shay's going to get along in Pawnee City."

The judge's prediction seemed to be borne out during the next few days.

Shay bought another herd the following day and two days later a third. Bokker saw him in the company of the prosecuting attorney the next day and on the third day, Fletcher Trow and Shay came out of the restaurant together, talking like old cronies.

Bokker stopped in for a glass of beer at the hotel saloon and saw Shay playing cards with the prosecutor and the mayor of Pawnee City, Steve Longtree, who owned the hardware store. The mayor had a sizable sum of money in front

of him and from his jovial attitude was apparently a big winner in the game.

Bokker, catching his eye, saw Shay wink.

And Paul Shay was becoming more than friendly with Ruth Compton. Bokker saw him go into the millinery store once or twice, and another time he saw the two riding past his office in a rented buggy.

Bokker, himself, had not talked with Ruth since the day of the trial. He was fairly busy himself. His defense of Shay and himself had impressed people in Pawnee City. Businessmen came to him to draw up contracts; he was the defending counsel in a law suit over a boundary line between two property owners and won the case. His opponent was Mike Huntley, the prosecutor, acting in a private capacity as a lawyer. Huntley showed considerable displeasure after losing his case.

Fletcher Trow did not avoid Bokker, nor did he put himself in Bokker's path.

Then, a week after Bokker arrived in Pawnee City, Tom Chaffee came to his office. "Got a prisoner keeps yowling he wants a lawyer."

"Huntley can't defend him?"

"Says he wants you."

"Very well, I'll go over and talk to him. What's the charge?"

"Resisting arrest."

"Arrest on what charge?"

"The usual, drunk—disorderly."

Bokker crossed to the jail with Chaffee. It was afternoon and the morning crop of prisoners, arrested during the night, had been disposed of. Bokker's prospective client was the only prisoner.

He was an unkempt-looking youth in his early twenties. A week's growth of beard concealed most of his features. Bokker was caught by the youth's pale blue eyes—and a bruise on his left temple.

"You sent for me?" he asked the prisoner.

"You're the lawyer?"

"Bokker's my name."

"Yeah, sure. You got to get me out of here."

"In this town, drunk and disorderly conduct is a misdemeanor——"

"They're charging me with resisting arrest." The youth touched the bruise on his temple.

"If you plead guilty, you'll be fined twenty-five dollars. At the very most, another twenty-five, if the judge sees fit to fine you for resisting arrest."

"Can't you get me out on bail?"

"There's no particular point in that. You'll only have to stay here overnight. In the morning——"

"In the morning I'll be dead!" cried the prisoner.

Bokker looked at him sharply. "That bruise——"

The prisoner made a gesture of dismissal. "That's nothin'. The deputy buffaloed me with his Navy gun. It's"—he looked nervously past Bokker toward the door leading to the Marshal's office—"it's the marshal," he whispered. "He recognized me."

"He's arrested you before?"

"No—no. He knows I know him from"—the prisoner's voice faltered "—from the war."

"The war's been over four years and more," said Bokker. "You weren't old enough then."

"The hell I wasn't!" retorted the youth. "I'm twenty-two."

"So you were eighteen in 'sixty-five."

"Sixteen in 'sixty-three, when we . . ." He did not finish.

Bokker's eyes narrowed. "In sixty-three, when Quantrell destroyed Lawrence?"

"Trow was there!"

"I know he was. And you?"

"I ain't sayin' I was and I ain't sayin' I wasn't. But the marshal was there and I—I know it. That's why you got to get me out of here."

Bokker looked thoughtfully at the young prisoner. That he had been at Lawrence he did not doubt. Quantrell's men had been young; it was common gossip that he had many fifteen- and sixteen-year-old boys in his bloody command; even boys fourteen. They had received an early baptism of blood and some of them had not returned to their farm homes after the war to resume peaceful occupations. The younger James boy could be no older than this youth before Bokker. And one or two of the Youngers of Harrisonville were not more than twenty or twenty-one even now. Yet they had been with Quantrell and were currently making a name for themselves as bank and train robbers.

Bokker said suddenly, "What's your name?"

"Uh—Smith."

"Your real name!"

"I'm tellin' you, Smith—uh—Bob Smith."

"All right, call yourself Smith," Bokker said impatiently. "Now, tell me what makes you think Fletcher Trow would kill you if you stayed in here overnight?"

"He's got to!" exclaimed the young prisoner. "I told you—I know who he is. I—I know what he done at Lawrence."

"A lot of people know that," said Bokker. "I know it myself."

"You wasn't there—you don't know all of it."

"What did Trow do in Lawrence, outside of killing people?"

"He was a captain. He made me——" Smith suddenly stopped. "I ain't a-goin' to tell you that. I'd be dead inside of an hour if Trow knew . . ."

Bokker had to restrain himself from reaching through the bars and seizing the young former guerrilla by the throat. He said carefully, "Have you got any money?"

"Yeah, sure. Here." Smith thrust a hand into his pocket and brought out a roll of greenbacks. Bokker counted the money.

"Sixty-one dollars. Enough for your fine, but not for bail if the judge sets it high."

"Get me out!" said Smith earnestly. "Get me out and keep the money. I've said too much already. Get me out and"—he came closer to Bokker and gripped the bars of the cell door—"Trow'll kill me, I tell you. You got to get me out."

"I'll do my best. I'll have to talk to the judge."

Bokker stepped to the door and went into the marshal's office. Tom Chaffee was seated behind Trow's desk, his feet up on it. The marshal, however, was not in the office.

Chaffee whistle tunelessly as Bokker went out.

Judge Paisley had a small office in the rear of the general store, but he was not in it when Bokker looked in. Bokker tried a couple of the saloons, a store or two and finally received word that the judge was down at the depot.

"Bokker," Judge Paisley greeted him, "you'll have a rest for a couple of days. I'm running down to Abilene on the afternoon train."

"You won't be holding court in the morning, then."

"I've no jurisdiction in Abilene—and that's where I'll be."

"I've been retained by a prisoner," Bokker said.

"That so? Anything important? The marshal hasn't made any report."

"It's a drunk and disorderly charge. Also, resisting arrest."

"Do the man good to sleep in jail a couple of days."

"I'd like to get him out on bail."

"A common drunk?"

"Yes."

The judge looked at Bokker curiously. "I've been trying these misdemeanor cases in the morning—the entire batch at one time. I don't like to convene court for one special case."

"I know—that's why I've asked for bail."

Judge Paisley frowned. "There's little enough co-operation between the marshal's office and the court. I don't want to antagonize Trow any more than I already have. . . . Very well, I'll set bail. Will a hundred dollars be all right?"

Bokker nodded. "The prisoner doesn't have that much. But I'll add some of my own money to it."

"You'll probably lose it. He'll get on his horse and leave Pawnee City the minute he gets out."

"I'll risk that."

"Very well. Come to my office and I'll sign a release order."

Ten minutes later, Bokker re-entered the marshal's office. Chaffee was still holding down the marshal's chair.

"Smith has been released on bail," Bokker said, handing the writ to the deputy.

Chaffee exclaimed, "Bail—a drunk?"

"Judge Paisley issued the writ."

Chaffee scowled at it. "I can't let any prisoner out without the marshal's say-so."

"Where is he?"

"Ain't seen him in a couple of hours."

"A writ is returnable immediately," Bokker explained. "You'll have to take the responsibility."

"Uh-uh, not me. I'm only the deputy."

"You refuse to honor this writ?"

"I don't refuse nothing. I'm just telling you that I don't have the authority to let a prisoner out of jail."

"If you can make arrest, you can let out a prisoner—with a writ signed by Judge Paisley."

Chaffee's face showed sudden relief as he glanced out of the window. "Here's Fletch!"

SEVENTEEN

Fletcher Trow came in from the street. He looked sharply at Bokker.

"He's got a writ from the judge," Chaffee explained, handing it to the marshal. "Says we got to release the prisoner."

"How'd he know we had a prisoner?"

Chaffee winced. "I—I guess I told him. The prisoner kept yammering about seeing a lawyer, so I——"

"You're taking a little too much on yourself, Chaffee!" snapped Trow.

Chaffee scowled. "I wouldn't honor the writ. Told him I didn't have the authority."

Trow tossed the writ to the desk. It was obvious that he was annoyed. It was more than mere annoyance, in fact. "All right," he said to Chaffee, "let him have the prisoner."

Chaffee picked up the large key from the desk and went into the cell block. He returned in a moment, young Smith at his heels. The prisoner kept his face averted, would not look at Fletcher Trow.

Bokker nodded and left the marshal's office. Outside, Smith said hurriedly, "Thanks, Mr. Bokker, thanks a lot."

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Bokker. "I want to talk to you."

"Later. Uh—I want to get something to eat."

"Now," said Bokker firmly.

Smith shot a quick look over his shoulder at the jail. He frowned apprehensively, then followed Bokker across the street to the latter's office.

When he had closed the door, Bokker said, "Now, what is it you know about Fletcher Trow?"

"I can't tell you. If Trow knew——"

"He isn't going to know," snapped Bokker. "He'll get nothing from me. I'm not exactly a friend of Fletcher Trow's. Here . . ." He strode into his bedroom and caught up his valise, emptied of clothes, but still containing a few odds and ends. He carried it back into his office and set it on the desk.

He opened the bag, reached in—and froze.

The magazine was not in the bag. Yet Bokker knew that

he had put it there the day he had shown it to Ruth Compton. He brushed the bag to the floor, whisked open the drawer of the table that served as his desk.

The magazine was not there, either.

His eyes met those of Smith. The youth looked at him, puzzled.

"I had something in this bag I wanted to show you. A magazine——" He stopped. "A copy of *Fred Cowan's Illustrated Weekly.*"

Smith's eyes widened. "The one with—with—with——" His eyes went to the window.

"The one with the sketch of Quantrell and his men at Lawrence. Fletcher Trow's in it."

Smith winced. "That—that's what *I* was going to tell you about."

"How long is it since you've seen the picture?"

"I dunno, a long time ago. Right after the war."

"You haven't seen it since?"

Smith hesitated, then shook his head. "It's four-five years ago, I'm sure."

"The picture," Bokker said carefully, "showed a number of guerrillas, some recognizable, some not. Here . . ." He caught up a pencil and pulled forward a pad of paper. "This is where Quantrell stood. Bloody Bill Anderson was here and here was Bill Grayson." A shudder ran through Smith. Bokker pushed the pencil into his hand. "Mark down the positions of the others— Fletcher Trow——"

Smith started to make a mark on the paper, then suddenly looked at Bokker. "You know a helluva lot about this." There was suspicion in his tone.

"I know a great deal," Bokker said grimly. "Go ahead. Next to Trow was MacDonald Pierson."

A gasp was torn from Smith's lips. Bokker exclaimed softly, "You're MacDonald Pierson!"

"No!" cried Smith. "MacDonald is dead. He died in Texas."

"How do you know? Were you there?"

"No. I—I heard about it."

"Who told you?"

"I don't remember."

"Only three men who were in that picture are still alive," Bokker went on remorselessly.

"That's a lie! They never got Jesse James."

"Jesse James wasn't at Lawrence."

"His brother Frank was. So was Cole Younger and Jim and——" Smith stopped. "What're you tryin' to do—put a rope around my neck? Or get me a bullet between my ribs?"

"I'm not going to do anything to you. I got you out of jail. I put up money of my own—your sixty-one dollars wasn't enough. I'll see that Trow doesn't harm you. But I want the names of these men. Here . . ." Bokker grabbed the pencil from Smith's hand.

"This was Trow, this was MacDonald Pierson. . . . Who was next?"

"Max— Max Hildebrand."

"No, Max was over here. Think, Mac, the man next to you. . . ."

Smith took a quick backward step. "You're trying to trick me. My name—my name ain't Pierson!"

"You can stop that. I recognize you now. Without the whiskers, your face is that of Pierson. I've studied every face in that picture until I can draw it from memory. Who was next to you, Mac—the man who was shooting the man you were dragging up?"

"You said you knew everyone!" cried Smith.

"I know the faces. I don't know the names."

Smith—or Pierson—stared at Bokker. "Who—who are you?"

"You know who I am. My name is Philip Bokker and I'm a lawyer. I got you out of jail and if you don't tell me now what I want to know, you're going back. I mean that, Pierson. I'll have your bail canceled and you'll go back into jail—with Fletcher Trow!"

Pierson would have talked, Bokker was sure of it. But just then the door was opened and Paul Shay entered. "Didn't know you were busy, Phil. Sorry. . . ."

"Do you mind, Paul? I'll see you in a little while."

Shay nodded and started to turn away. Then he stopped. "It's rather important, Phil. It'll take just half a minute. . . ."

He indicated the door. Annoyed, Bokker followed him outside, closing the door on young Pierson.

"What is it, Paul?" he asked.

"Trow," said Shay, "he's got something up his sleeve. Pumped me for about a half hour. Or, tried to pump me. I'm afraid he's up to something."

"So am I," said Bokker.

"Watch out, Phil!" Shay warned. "Trow's dangerous. Don't understimate him. I—I've been getting rather friendly with him these last few days. He pretends to be a calm man, but he's like a coiled steel spring inside. Apt to explode any minute."

"Thanks for telling me. I'll watch——" Bokker's eyes went to the window. A cry was torn from his throat and he whirled and kicked open the door of his office. Pierson was no longer in it. Bokker plunged on into the little bedroom. The window was open and Pierson was just disappearing through it.

Bokker sprang from the window. "Stop!" he cried. He started to clamber after Pierson, then suddenly remembered that he did not have his gun. He turned back, knocked aside the pillow from the cot and grabbed up the Navy gun. He thrust it under the waistband of his trousers and then climbed swiftly through the window.

He hit the earth in the alley behind the row of stores. Pierson was no longer in sight. He had already turned into Kiowa Street, the single cross street in Pawnee City.

Bokker pounded toward the street, made a swift turn and ran to the main street. Fifty feet away, MacDonald Pierson was vaulting onto a horse.

He let out a yip, jammed his heels into the horse's belly and it was off, galloping within a few strides. Bokker looked around for a horse. The closest was thirty yards away, almost in front of his office. He ran toward it, aware that Paul Shay whom he had left on the sidewalk, was running toward him.

"Phil!" Shay cried. "What's up?"

"Haven't got time!" Bokker shouted.

He rushed to the horse, jerked the slip knot by which it was tied to the hitchrail and mounted swiftly. He turned the horse into the street and sent it after that on which Pierson was already a hundred yards away.

Bokker went a hundred yards and knew that he had lost. The mount he had taken haphazardly was heavy, clumsy, while Pierson's was a fleet Texas mustang. Bokker lost fifty feet in the first hundred yards. Another hundred yards or so and he was hopelessly outdistanced.

Seething, Bokker turned back.

Shay was standing in front of Bokker's office, arguing with a middle-aged farmer. The farmer saw Bokker and came to the rail as Bokker dismounted. "What's the idee takin' my horse like that?" the man demanded.

"Sorry," said Bokker, "I was in a hurry."

"I got a good notion to report you to the marshal," the farmer went on.

"Mister," said Paul Shay, "this is Mr. Bokker, a lawyer——"

"A lawyer!" exclaimed the man.

Bokker thrust a five-dollar gold piece into the man's hand. "This'll pay for the loan of your horse." He turned away. "Paul, I need a horse. A good one."

"How badly do you need it?"

"Plenty!"

"Then don't bother trying the livery stable. They've only got plugs to rent. Mmmm—have you seen that bay I bought a couple of days ago?"

"That's what I was thinking of.'"

Shay hesitated, then suddenly nodded. "You won't find many faster. If it's really important, Phil—take it."

"I'm going to ride it hard."

"Go ahead. This—has something to do with——"

"The man I had in my office was MacDonald Pierson. I've told you about him."

Shay whistled softly. "Take the horse. It's over in the livery stable. Wait—I'll go with you so you won't lose time."

They crossed swiftly to the livery stable and Shay himself got his saddle and threw it upon a rangy bay in a stall. Bokker quickly tightened the cinches and mounting, started out of the stable.

"Luck!" called Shay.

Bokker stooped so his head would clear the door. He rode into the street and sent the bay into a swift trot. Once clear of the street traffic he let out the animal. Pierson had started off at a swift gallop. All of Quantrell's men had been fine horsemen. Pierson would know that he must not wind his horse in a prolonged gallop. Panic had sent him off at a gallop, but he would soon pull up and save his horse for a grueling later race.

Bokker decided to pace his horse. He let it out into a fast trot that ate up the distance yet left his horse with enough for a final burst of speed. Pierson had a good start on him, five-six minutes. Possibly seven. He could be two miles ahead of Bokker. Three.

It was a long head start.

EIGHTEEN

A mile out of Pawnee City and Bokker thought that he sighted the fugitive. He let out his mount a little. The spot on the prairie grew bigger and he suddenly groaned. It was a stunted cottonwood. He continued on to it, then pulled up.

The prairie from a distance seemed flat, yet it had a deceptive roll to it. You could see a fairly large object at a distance of two or three miles and miss one just as large only a half mile away. You saw the object on the summit of a swell, did not see it in the shallow valley.

Bokker dismounted. He could not afford to underestimate MacDonald Pierson. He was twenty-two, but at sixteen he had ridden with Quantrell. He had grown up in the border country. Horsemanship, outdoor lore was instinctive with him. Bokker could not assume that Pierson would continue in a mad flight, as straight across the prairie as a stampeding steer. Pierson knew his trade. He would circle and dodge, cover his trail and confuse it. Bokker was now two miles out of Pawnee City.

In two miles Pierson should have recovered from his fright. Bokker studied the ground around him. It was cut up by the hoofs of many cattle. Here and there a shod horse's hoofprint showed. Cowboys riding herd, trotting. No marks of a hard galloping horse, no fresh horse's prints.

Bokker climbed back into the saddle and made a wide circle, leaning low on the right side of his horse to study the buffalo grass sod over which he rode. He was losing time, but it was the only thing he could do. His first circle was a hundred yards. He widened it into a two hundred yard circle. Coming back to the cottonwood he made his third circuit.

And then he struck the fresh trail of a galloping horse. It was headed west, slightly south. Bokker, had he continued, would have gone away from it at an angle.

He let out his horse again, watching the trail as he rode. It was a wearing ride, but Bokker, although no longer accustomed to the saddle, did not mind. He was going to

come up with MacDonald Pierson. He knew that. After a mile or so, the trail of Pierson's horse turned again, west by north now.

Bokker turned with the trail. Pierson's trail continued to give way to the right. An hour after leaving Pawnee City, Bokker guessed that he had made a half circle. Pierson had started out due south and was now riding straight north.

No, he had turned again. He was now going east by north.

Bokker pulled up Shay's bay. There was nothing ahead of him, nothing but a vast stretch of prairie. Straight east was the railroad, a town nine or ten miles from Pawnee City, Acorn by name.

Bokker exhaled heavily and decided to take a big gamble. If he guessed wrong, he would lose Pierson. But if he was right, he would catch up with him in Acorn, possibly arrive there even before the former guerrilla.

He jerked his horse's head due east and sent it into a swift run. He let out the horse after a few minutes, into a gallop, pulled it up after a while and rested it a few minutes. Then he went into a swift trot.

The prairie lost its light. Behind Bokker the sun was dipping below the horizon. Shay's bay was laboring. Exclaiming under his breath, Bokker dug his heels into the animal's flanks, into its barrel. The horse broke into a run, its breath whistling.

A flickering light appeared ahead, after a few moments a group of lights.

"A little more," Bokker said to the horse.

The bay, however, had given all it could. Acorn was a quarter of a mile ahead, a cluster of buildings huddled around a tiny depot on the Kansas & Pacific.

A mighty shudder ran through the horse. Bokker pulled it up and dismounted. He loosened the saddle and threw it to the ground. He took off the bridle and clapped the horse on a flank.

"Sorry," he said.

He started walking toward Acorn.

Full darkness had fallen when he reached the little depot. It was dark, but Bokker stopped on the platform to size up the hamlet. It consisted of two stores, a saloon and three or four houses. A wagon stood in front of one of the stores. Two horses were tied to the hitchrail and the rail in front of the saloon had four horses tied to it.

Bokker walked toward the store, stopped by the horses and felt each. They were cool, dry. He continued on to the saloon. The horses there were also cool.

Either Bokker had guessed wrong—and lost—or he had reached Acorn ahead of his quarry.

Bokker buttoned his coat over the Navy pistol, stuck behind the waistband of his trousers, and entered the saloon.

It was a small place, containing a bar not more than seven or eight feet long and two tables. A card game was going on at one of the tables, with four players. Another patron stood at the bar, hunched over a glass of beer.

Bokker stepped up to the bar.

"Evenin'," the bartender greeted him. He was an enormously fat man with a huge pair of walrus mustaches.

Bokker nodded. "A glass of beer."

The bartender drew a glass of foaming liquid. Bokker took a long pull at it, then holding the glass, turned his back to the bar to size up the card players.

He watched for a minute or two, sipping the rest of his beer.

"Ain't you the lawyer from Pawnee City?" the bartender asked suddenly.

Bokker turned. "Why, yes."

"Thought I recognized you. I was in court a couple of days ago. . . ." The man frowned. "That judge is mighty free with his twenty-five dollar fines."

"He's a good man."

"For the county, maybe. You take that marshal of your'n; you'd think he was gettin' half the fines hisself the way he arrests people for hardly doin' anything. There I was mindin' my own business, havin' a sociable drink with some friends, when all of a sudden—wham—he comes up and says I'm under arrest and when I ask him what for, he clouts me one. Lucky he was wearin' that badge of his, or I'd have give him somethin' to remember me by." The bartender growled. "So I spent a night in the calaboose and had to pay twenty-five dollars to the judge in the morning."

"Who takes care of the law here?" Bokker asked.

"Nobody; that's one thing we ain't bothered with. 'Course, there's a sheriff, but he stays at the county seat—Bad Axe—fifty-some miles to the north. Ain't even seen the sheriff this year. He'll be around this fall, though. Election time. Then he knows us. Otherwise he leaves us alone. Had a little

shootin' here, two-three months ago. I wrote the sheriff a letter and he wrote back. Bury 'em, he says. Hell, we already did that."

Bokker, his ears cocked, heard the clop-clop of a horse out on the street. He turned abruptly away from the bar, crossed quickly to the door and pulled it open. Light from the interior framed a horse and rider pulling up to the hitchrail.

"Don't reach!" Bokker called.

His gun was already in his hand. Pierson, astride a weary horse, cried out. His hand went for his gun. Bokker fired, deliberately missing Pierson, but sending his bullet within an inch or two of the former guerrilla's face.

"Damn you!" cried Pierson.

But he did not draw his gun. His hands went slowly up and Bokker ducked under the hitchrail and plucked the gun from Pierson's holster. He had the weapon in his hand before the shock hit him.

Pierson had left Pawnee City without a gun or holster. He had both now. Where had he picked them up?

"Where'd you get the gun?" he demanded.

"It was on the horse," the youth whined.

"And the holster?"

"Yeah . . . yeah!"

"You're lying, Mac. Just like you lied to me in Pawnee City."

Behind Bokker the door of the saloon banged open. The bartender's voice boomed out, "What's goin' on?"

"Private business," Bokker called over his shoulder.

"Don't believe it!" suddenly screamed MacDonald Pierson. "He's trying to kill me. Don't—don't let him!"

"That right, mister?" demanded the bartender.

A man came running from the store. Light flashed on a revolver in his hand.

It was Tom Chaffee, Deputy Marshal of Pawnee City.

"Bokker!"

Behind Chaffee came a woman, a woman wearing a divided riding skirt.

Ruth Compton.

Chaffee said, "You'd better get that man back to Pawnee City, Bokker, or you'll forfeit your bail."

"He's going back," Bokker said.

Ruth came up and recognized Bokker. "Phil, what in the

world are you doing here?" Then she sized up the tableau. "Not—again!"

Bokker replaced his gun behind the waistband of his trousers. He still held Pierson's, however.

"I didn't expect to see you here, Ruth," he said stiffly.

"I just got here a half hour ago. Tom—Mr. Chaffee rode over with me."

"Her partner skipped town," Chaffee explained.

"Mrs. Melcher?" Bokker said sharply.

Ruth bit her lip. "She said she had to visit her sister here in Acorn. I didn't think anything of it when she left this morning, but then this afternoon"—she hesitated—"a man came in with a bill. Mrs. Melcher hadn't paid for a single one of the hats that were in the store."

"You'd think only a man'd do a thing like that, wouldn't you?" chuckled Chaffee.

"Mrs. Melcher's here?"

"Uh-uh, not so's you'd notice. Sure, she rode this far, but she took the train here in the morning. In Kansas City by now."

"I've been a fool!" burst out Ruth Compton. "I've lost all my money."

"Perhaps I was at fault," Bokker said. "I should have insisted on Mrs. Melcher's showing you receipted bills for her merchandise."

"You couldn't have known," Ruth said. She turned to Chaffee. "I'm sorry I caused you so much trouble, Mr. Chaffee. I guess we may as well start back for Pawnee City."

"Kinda late to be traveling."

"But there isn't any place here to stay overnight."

"I'll be going back," Bokker said. Then he winced. "I forgot—I have no horse . . ."

"How'd you get here?" Chaffee asked.

"My horse gave out a short distance out of town." Bokker placed his hand on Pierson's mount. "I don't think this horse is good for another mile, either."

"I'd just as lief stay here," Pierson said quickly.

"You're going back with me," Bokker said firmly. "Get down."

Pierson slid to the ground, groaning as his feet hit the hard earth. He was stiff from steady riding. "I don't feel like ridin' no more today."

"You did a lot more riding a few years ago," Bokker reminded.

"Yeah, but then——" Pierson caught himself and grabbed at Bokker's arm. "Don't!" he said, under his breath.

"You'll ride?"

"Yes."

NINETEEN

Bokker turned to the fat saloonkeeper. "Do you suppose we could rent a couple of horses?"

"Ain't no livery stable here."

"I know there isn't, but still, is there anyone who'd let us ride a pair of horses to Pawnee City? I'd be glad to pay. . . ."

"How much?"

"Whatever's necessary."

The bartender pointed to the buckboard standing in front of the store. "That buggy's mine. Too fat to climb on a horse and I live out a piece. You want to drive that to Pawnee City—for twenty dollars?"

Bokker took money from his pocket and paid the bartender. "I'll take the train up in the morning and drive 'er back," the fat man said. "Just leave 'er in the livery stable in Pawnee City."

"Phil," Ruth said, "would you mind terribly? I'm not up to riding a horse. Do you suppose——"

"Sure," chimed in Chaffee. "The kid can ride your horse, and you can ride with the lawyer man in the buckboard."

Bokker swore under his breath. He was not going to let MacDonald Pierson ride with Chaffee. He said, "I've got a better idea, Chaffee. You let me ride your horse and Smith will ride Miss Compton's. You two take the buckboard."

"Thank you!" cried Ruth. "I'll ride my horse back."

"Make up your mind, Bokker," Chaffee said mockingly.

"I'm responsible for Smith," Bokker said stubbornly. "Judge Paisley released him in my custody."

"He wouldn't get away from me," Chaffee said. "Least, not very far."

"That's what I'm afraid of," snapped Bokker. Angrily he looked after Ruth who was walking back toward the store, where her horse was tied to the rail.

"Don't move!" Bokker said tersely to Pierson. He strode after Ruth, catching up to her out of earshot of Chaffee and Pierson. He caught her arm, whirled her around.

"Help me out," he said tautly. "That young ruffian's MacDonald Pierson, one of the men I've been looking for. I don't trust Chaffee. He may be in with Fletcher Trow and if he is, Pierson will never get back to Pawnee City."

"So you're still on that!" Ruth exclaimed bitterly. "I'd thought——"

"I can't help it," interrupted Bokker. "Trow had him in jail and I got him out, then he made a run for it. I caught up with him and I can't take a chance on his getting away again—or being killed. He's the weak link in the chain and I can make him talk. I *know* I can."

"And if he doesn't, you'll kill him? You'll probably kill him if he does."

Bokker exclaimed, "You can be pretty stubborn at times."

"I told you the other day what I thought of you. I've got enough troubles of my own."

"I'll help you with those," Bokker promised.

"Don't bother!"

Chaffee called, "What'll it be, Bokker? Buckboard or saddle?"

"I'll ride with the marshal," Ruth said coldly, "but that's all."

"I won't ask a favor again," Bokker retorted.

He stood by while she climbed into the buckboard. Bokker had an idea she would have struck his arm aside had he tried to help her.

Chaffee came over, walking behind Pierson. "There're the horses, Bokker." He chuckled again. "Nice night for a buggy ride—with a pretty girl. See you in Pawnee City."

He climbed into the buckboard beside Ruth, picked up the lines and clucked to the team of horses.

"All right," Bokker snapped at Pierson. "Climb aboard."

"You're not puttin' me back in jail?"

"After what you've done——"

"No!" cried Pierson. "I won't go."

"Get on that horse," Bokker said grimly, "or I'll put you on, face down."

The buckboard was turning beyond the store, where a trail of sorts meandered along toward Pawnee City, ten miles away. Bokker mounted one of the horses and waited for Pierson to clamber aboard the other horse.

He hesitated. "How's the road to Pawnee City?"

Pierson shrugged. "It's all right, I guess."

"You've been over it?"

"Once or twice. I mean, I rode over it yesterday and—once quite a spell back."

He turned his horse to head for the store. Bokker said. "The other way!"

Pierson wheeled his horse. "What?"

"We're not taking the road. The railroad tracks lead to Pawnee City."

"You can't ride them at night. Horses'd stumble on the ties."

"We'll ride beside the rails—on the other side."

Pierson swore. "Damn it, Bokker, you've got a rough way about you."

"You want to get back to Pawnee City alive?"

"What're you talkin' about?"

"There're a lot of things I don't like about you, Pierson. And I don't like some other things. . . . Chaffee being here in Acorn, for example."

"You heard what he said—he came over with the girl."

"That's what *he* said."

"*She* said it, too, Besides"—Pierson cocked his head to one side—"the deputy said you was sweet on her. The way you're talkin' now——"

"When did Chaffee say that about me?" snapped Bokker.

"When you went after her. He thought it was funny—you bein' sweet on her and wantin' her to ride with him in the buckboard."

"He'd have preferred riding with you," retorted Bokker. "Especially since I've got your gun. Which reminds me . . . never mind, let's get going."

He signaled ahead and Pierson moved off past the saloon and across the tracks by the depot. On the far side of the tracks Pierson, with Bokker at his side, turned west.

"That gun," Bokker said, then, "where'd you get it?"

"I told you—it was on the horse."

"It wasn't," Bokker said positively.

"All right, I found it," snarled Pierson.

"On a dead man?"

"Damn you, Bokker," cried Pierson. "I can't make you out. Whose side are you on—Trow's? You made out like you was his enemy and then——"

"And then you chickened out on me. You were going to talk if I got you out of jail, but the moment you were out

you became chicken. Perhaps you'd be more willing to talk if I took you back and put you under Trow's protection."

"I've told you everything I know."

"No, you haven't."

"I don't get it, Bokker—what's your interest in all that?"

"Pierson," said Bokker, "you're on a horse. I'll give you this gun and you can ride that horse right now, anywhere you please—if you'll tell me just one thing. One word. The name of the man who was beside you in that picture in *Fred Cowan's Illustrated Weekly.*"

"I don't know, Bokker. I told you—it's years since I saw the picture."

"But you did see it. And you were there in Lawrence. You know who was with you in front of the Eldridge House. You know who killed the man in the picture."

"What're you—a relative?" cried Pierson.

"No," said Bokker. "I have no relatives in Lawrence. I never had any. And I've never been in Lawrence in my life."

"Then what's your interest in it? Let it go—it's past and done with."

"Fletcher Trow doesn't think so. You said so yourself. You were afraid he'd kill you."

"Trow was one of Quantrell's captains, I told you that. He gave the orders for us—me, I mean."

"Bill Grayson was a captain under Quantrell."

"Yes, but he's——" Pierson stopped.

"Dead?"

Pierson did not reply.

"It was you in Raytown, Pierson, wasn't it?"

"I haven't been in Raytown since—since the war."

"You were there ten days ago. When Bill Grayson was killed."

"That's a lie!"

"Then how'd you know he was dead?"

"I heard—I saw it in the paper."

"You saw *my* name in the paper?"

Pierson hesitated. "Yes. That's—that's why I asked for you today. I heard you were in Pawnee City."

"Who told you?"

"I saw your name on your office, before I was arrested by Trow."

"You're lying again. I'm going to ask you that question once more, Pierson, and I want an answer. Who was——?"

"Hawkins!" exclaimed Pierson. "Harry Hawkins, that's who it was."

Bokker kneed his horse so it moved close beside Pierson's. He smashed out with his left hand and struck Pierson a savage blow in the face.

Pierson cried out in pain and rage. "I'll kill you, Bokker! Damn you, I'll kill you for that."

"Be lucky if I don't kill you," snapped Bokker. "I've had enough of your lies. Hawkins—that's the first name that came to your mind."

"It's the first and the last." Pierson dabbed at his mouth with his finger tips. "Nobody's going to hit me. Get down from that horse and I'll fight you."

"I'd beat you to a pulp!"

"Try it!" challenged Pierson.

Bokker was tempted to halt and accept the former guerrilla's challenge, but he did not think it would serve any purpose. He would beat Pierson into insensibility and then he would have to start all over again. A pummeling would not make Pierson talk.

None of them talked. Grayson had not talked. Fletcher Trow would not talk. And now, Pierson. Bokker was so near to the end of the trail and the last, thin curtain between him and the end stood before him like a sheet of steel . . . because a man would not speak . . . would not say a single name. Just one word.

Pierson's voice penetrated Bokker's thoughts. "Somebody's ahead."

Bokker's mind came back to the present. He pulled up his horse. "Wait!" he exclaimed.

Pierson stopped a few feet ahead of Bokker. The latter strained his ears. "I don't hear anything."

A streak of flame lanced the darkness ahead of him. The sharp, familiar crack of a revolver broke the stillness.

"They're going to kill me!" screamed Pierson. "You got to gimme a gun."

"Quiet!" snarled Bokker, whipping out his own gun.

A gun thundered again. A bullet whined within inches of Bokker.

A voice called out, "Bokker!"

Bokker fired at the sound of the voice—and gave away his position. In the almost total darkness the ambushers could not distinguish between Bokker and Pierson. And it

was Bokker they wanted, not Pierson. A crash of gunfire followed Bokker's fire. More than one gun, more than two.

A bullet tugged at Bokker's coat sleeve, another tore through between his arm and side, taking along a strip of skin.

Lightning seemed to strike Bokker. There was a sudden blaze of varicolored lights in his brain, a crashing like thunder and then—total darkness!

TWENTY

A thousand little devils were prodding at the brain of Bokker. He writhed and groaned and the little devils merged and became one giant who rammed a red-hot bar of steel into him. He cried out in pain and became fully conscious suddenly and was aware of a vast aching in his head. He sat up and tentatively touched his head. His finger became wet.

He realized that he was sitting on the prairie, that a bullet had creased his scalp. How deep the crease was he could not determine. But he was alive—alive and conscious. The last he remembered, he had fired at the ambushers who had waylaid him and MacDonald Pierson. He had been hit. The fact that he had been shot only once indicated that his horse had bolted in the darkness. He had apparently clung to it long enough to elude the pursuers and had then tumbled to the buffalo grass of the prairie. It had been almost pitch-dark then and the would-be assassins had been unable to find him.

How long he had lain unconscious on the prairie he had no way of knowing. A moon was up, a faint crescent that dimly lighted the prairie. The stars were bright.

Bokker climbed unsteadily to his feet. The aching in his head became duller.

He was alive; that was all that counted. He looked up at the sky and picked out the North Star. It was as good as a compass for telling him the directions, but whether he was north or south of the tracks of the Kansas & Pacific he had no way of knowing. Wait—wasn't there a faint yellowness in the sky to the west and south?

Pawnee City, at night.

He began walking. His head throbbed, but pain had to be borne. He trudged along. The yellowness in the west became lighter and after some time became faint prinpricks of lights.

A little while later Bokker heard a faint gunshot. Yes, that was Pawnee City ahead of him. He cut the railroad tracks, followed them for a little while, then circled so that he would enter the town from the south.

He crossed Main Street, at the outskirts of town and noted that there were still quite a few horses tied at the hitchrails. The stores, of course, were closed, but the saloons were still doing a thriving business.

Darkness had fallen when he had reached Acorn. They had left the little hamlet before nine o'clock. The return walk of almost ten miles had taken him possibly two and a half or three hours. That would bring the time close to midnight—but he would have to add to it the time he had been unconscious on the prairie. That could have been five minutes and it could have been five hours. No, not the latter, for that would have made it dawn now.

An hour or two.

He slipped between two buildings and made his way cautiously to the alley.

Counting the buildings from Kiowa Street, he reached the back of the little shack that housed his office. Instinct made him move with caution, even after he saw that the window through which he had followed MacDonald Pierson was open.

He was a bare half-dozen feet from the window when his nostrils were assailed by smoke. Cigar smoke. Fresh cigar smoke.

Someone was inside his place, seated or lying on his cot; someone smoking a cigar.

They were waiting for him. They had not found him on the prairie and had returned to Pawnee City to finish the job.

Bokker froze. The foot he had in the air at the instant he let down slowly, carefully. There was a creaking inside his room. Bokker squatted, placed his palms upon the ground and flattened himself out. The cigar smoke became stronger. Bokker, turning his head a careful inch or two, was able to see the window. A black figure almost filled it. Whoever was inside his room was standing by the window looking out. It was too dark, however, to make out the face of the man.

Bokker waited. A faint footfall came after a moment, then a squeaking. The man had left the window and returned to the bed.

Bokker got up and moved quietly away from the window. He continued down the alley. He counted buildings again and reached the little frame one occupied by the Bon Ton Millinery Shop. Ruth Compton slept behind her shop, as did Bokker.

He stood behind the millinery shop, frowning in the dark-

ness. He was in a precarious position. He was unarmed and hunted by a man, or men, who were trying to kill him, A normal citizen could have gone to the marshal's office, or the jail, for help, but that was the last place on earth that Bokker could go.

Trow was back of it, of course. But more than one man had attacked him on the way from Acorn. Chaffee. . . . Chaffee had been south of the tracks, driving Ruth Compton to Pawnee City in a buckboard.

Someone else had been with Trow—someone who had known that he would be in Acorn and would be returning to Pawnee City in the dark.

Bokker shook his head and changed his thinking. It could have been Chaffee. Bokker had seen him leave Acorn, yes, but Chaffee could have met someone a minute or two out of the little hamlet. He could have changed from the buckboard to a horse, gone swiftly ahead, cut the railroad tracks and met Bokker and Pierson.

That line of thinking presented another problem, however. What had happened to Ruth Compton?

Bokker suddenly moved toward the window of Ruth Compton's bedroom, behind her millinery shop. He reached it. The window was closed, a shade inside was drawn to the sill.

Bokker tested the window. The catch inside was locked, but the window was a poor fitting one. A knife blade could be worked in where the upper and lower windows met and force back the window catch.

Bokker found his penknife, opened it and slipped it between the two window halves. He found the catch, pressed hard to the left. His knife blade went through. The catch was open.

He drew a deep breath, gripped the window and raised it a fraction of an inch. It moved smoothly for a bit, then suddenly squeaked. It was a very faint squeak but to Bokker it seemed as loud as the scream of a dying cat.

He waited a moment, but there was no sound inside the room. He raised the window a full six inches in one quick movement and without a squeak, then repeated the procedure. Finally he had the window sufficiently high to permit his ingress into the bedroom beyond.

There was still the drawn shade, but Bokker decided against raising it. He pushed it inward carefully, threw one leg over the window sill and followed through. He stood

then inside the room, his back to the open window, the shade covering him from the room.

Carefully he stooped and permitted the window shade to flap against the sill. He was inside the room now, in total darkness. The room was small, he knew, and would contain a bed, possibly two. He listened and heard breathing and locating the source of it, made out a deeper shadow that was a bed.

He took a step forward—and stepped on a loose board.

A gasp told him that the occupant of the bed had awakened. Bokker threw caution to the wind; he could not risk a sudden scream that would attract neighbors. The window was open, the walls were flimsy enough. A scream would bring people.

He lunged forward in the darkness. His knees struck a bed and he reached out. A scream started and Bokker, in panic, shot out his hands. They struck a face, smothered the rest of the scream. Then Bokker was very busy for a moment. Ruth Compton fought him. She was caught at a disadvantage but she had a lithe strength and she was fighting with every ounce of fury in her body. She bit at his hands, she raked his face with her nails, she struck him with her fists and she squirmed and heaved and tried to get out from under his weight.

"Quiet!" cried Bokker in soft panic. "It's me—Bokker!"

She fought harder.

"Ruth," Bokker continued desperately, "don't—it's Phil Bokker!"

She stopped fighting then, but her body was tensed. He held a hand over her mouth. "I was ambushed near Acorn," Bokker said, talking very fast. "I was wounded and I've just come back to Pawnee City. Someone's in my place, waiting to kill me. I—I haven't got a gun."

She could not reply, of course, and he tentatively raised his hand a fraction of an inch. If she tried to scream he would clap it down again. She didn't scream, however.

"Let me up!"

He sat down on the edge of the bed, inches from her.

"I've got to get a gun, Ruth," he said quietly. "You've got to help me."

"So you can kill again?" she threw at him.

"So I can keep from being killed. What—what happened after you left Acorn?"

"Nothing. What did you expect would happen?"

"Chaffee rode back to Pawnee City with you?"

"Of course—and I've been asleep for hours."

"But you must have heard shooting—you weren't so far ahead of us . . ."

"We heard shooting, all right," Ruth said, "but I've heard shooting every night since I came to Kansas. The marshal stayed with me all the way to Pawnee City—if that's what you mean."

"Then it was Trow." Bokker paused. "Trow and someone with him."

"You're still on that subject!"

Bokker stood up. He looked down to where he knew Ruth was lying.

The bed squeaked and Ruth's voice came from the darkness. "I don't like this, your coming into my bedroom at night."

An electric shock seemed to shoot through Bokker. He reached out suddenly, his hand touching Ruth's nightgowned figure, brushing it. She pulled away instantly, but Bokker knew.

He said, "You came to my bedroom once."

"What?"

"In Raytown. It was you. . . ."

He heard her gasp. "Are you out of your mind?" she cried.

"Something about you bothered me right from the start. Your voice. You'd disguised it in Raytown and I didn't make the association because of the way I met you on the train—a lone girl, annoyed by a traveling salesman. It couldn't have happened better to lull any suspicion I might have had."

"I don't know what you're talking about!"

He reached into his pocket, found a match and flicked it into light with his thumbnail. In the sudden flicker of light he saw Ruth in a flimsy nightgown. Her hands were clenched into fists that she held before her breast.

He blew out the match. "Put on some clothes. We're going to talk."

"At this time of the night?"

"I've no choice," Bokker said. "I can't go to my quarters—I can't show myself on the street."

There was a moment's silence on her part, then she said, "Wait!" He heard her rummaging about in the dark and stepped back to the window. Reaching behind the shade, he pushed down the window.

He stood waiting.

It was she who struck a match this time. She applied it to the wick of a kerosene lamp and Bokker, turning, saw that she had put on a bathrobe or dressing gown. She was replacing the chimney on the lamp .

She straightened and saw the matted hair on the left side of his head, the caked blood and dirt on his face. She exclaimed softly.

"You've been hurt!"

"I told you I was shot."

She came swiftly around the bed. "You ought to have the doctor take care of it."

"I can't."

She looked around, her eyes falling upon a pitcher and bowl on the washstand. She went to it, got a towel and poured water from the pitcher into the bowl.

"All right," she said.

He crossed and sat on the far edge of the bed. She dabbed a towel into the water and washed the dried blood from his face. She worked carefully, her touch light. When she reached the vicinity of the wound, Bokker braced himself.

It hurt, but no sound came from him. He sat, his jaws clenched, until she finished washing his face and head. She went to a tiny dresser then, pulled out a drawer and brought out a sheet. She ripped strips from it, made a pad and bandaged his head neatly, securely.

He said, finally, "Thanks."

"I'd do as much for anyone.

There was still hostility in her tone. He said, "I guess there was no chance for us to be friends. Right from the start——"

"You didn't try," she accused.

"I tried," Bokker said. "I tried very hard."

"You came to Raytown to rake up old fires, dig up skeletons that were better left buried. You—killed two men."

"One," Bokker corrected.

"Two men were killed."

"I didn't kill Bill Grayson"—he paused—"the man whose sister you claimed to be."

She made a small gesture, dismissing the old lie.

He said, "Who are you?"

"It's too late for that."

"Is it?"

"You wouldn't stop," she said poignantly. "Even after Ray-

town, you went on. I—I didn't hate you at the beginning, but day by day——"

"Well, that much is out," he interrupted. "You don't have to continue pretending. You don't have to lie any more."

"Lie?"

"It's been nothing but lies," Bokker said. "You said you were Grayson's sister. . . . On the train you said you came from Ohio and had only two hundred dollars—and then you paid five hundred for a half interest in this place——"

"You made me lie!" she accused. "Your continual prodding and questioning. How could I remember what I'd said? You never left off questions, questions, questions. . . . I didn't know what I was saying or doing any more."

"Always," Bokker said, "I've wanted just one answer—one answer to one question. I couldn't get it from Grayson, I couldn't get it from Trow and I couldn't get it from Pierson."

"Stop it!" she exclaimed. "Stop it. I can't take any more." He saw then that she was near the breaking point. The hard surface she had presented to him from the first moment he had known her back in Raytown was all assumed. She had fought to maintain it—and was losing the battle.

Yet she was the weakest link; not Pierson as he had thought, but Ruth . . . Ruth Compton, or whatever her name was. She would tell him, she would talk if he pushed her just a little more. She would break, yes, but she would talk. She would spill out the name he had sought for so long.

TWENTY-ONE

She stood before him, slight and shivering, trembling and pathetic. She was sheltering and protecting a black-hearted murderer—but Bokker suddenly could not push her further.

He said gently, "I'll leave by the window."

He walked around the window, reached behind the shade and again raised the window. He heard her move then and he looked back. She was watching him, an almost dazed look in her eyes.

"Good night," he said.

She did not reply.

He pulled out the curtain, swung his feet out of the window and dropped lightly to the ground.

He walked quickly away from her window, but stopped in the alley.

There was still no safety for him in Pawnee City, not while it was night.

Yes, there was. There was a place where he would be safe. Several places, for that matter, but one in particular.

The Pawnee City Hotel-Bar.

He turned and walked swiftly down the alley. He had no trouble picking out the place from the rear, but when he tried the only door that opened on the alley, he found it locked.

There was, however, a narrow passageway between the hotel and the adjoining store. He slipped through it, paused a moment at the sidewalk, then stepped out boldly.

A cowboy was coming out of the hotel, but otherwise no one saw him. Bokker pushed past the cowboy, pulled open the front door of the hotel and was in sanctuary.

The night hotel clerk sat in a rocking chair, dozing. Bokker passed him and entered the saloon.

A clock behind the bar told him that it was ten minutes of three. A bleary-eyed cowboy hung over the bar. Another sat by a table, his head resting on it, sound asleep. At the rear of the room were at least a dozen men, most of them

sitting or standing around a poker game. As long as the game continued the saloon would stay open. Bokker knew that.

He went toward the game. Before he reached it, Fletcher Trow, watching the game, turned. He grunted as he saw Bokker.

"Somebody caught up with you, eh?"

"Somebody did, yes," Bokker retorted.

Facing him, across the table, sat Paul Shay. He exclaimed when he saw Bokker.

"Phil, what happened?"

"I stopped one." Bokker's eyes fell and traveled swiftly around the table. There were only five players in the game; two were obviously professional gamblers, possibly house men for the saloon. Shay was the third player. The fourth was Mike Huntley, the prosecuting attorney and the final man was Longtree, the mayor of Pawnee City.

A few gold coins were in front of Shay, a thin packet of greenbacks. He suddenly pushed back his chair. "Just a moment, gentlemen," he said to the card players.

He walked to one side, signaling for Bokker to follow.

"What happened, Phil?" he asked when they were out of earshot of the group around the poker game.

"I caught up with Pierson—and then I was ambushed on the way back."

"Who—who, Phil?"

"Who but Trow? But there was someone with him."

Shay frowned. "After you left this afternoon, I went over to the jail. There was a man with him—big bruiser. Trow called him Mitchum, or Mitchell or something like that."

"Mechem?"

"Could be."

"Charr Mechem!" Bokker's eyes went back to the group around the table. But Mechem was not there. He was probably in Bokker's bedroom, waiting.

"Have you seen Tom Chaffee?"

"Not in the last couple of hours. He dropped in around midnight." Shay suddenly winced. I've been having the devil's own luck, Phil. I—I'm in the same spot as when we first hit Pawnee City."

"You've lost all the money you made?"

"Worse, Phil. What's on the table is all that's left of two thousand of my company's money. Less than a hundred dollars."

"You can quit, can't you?"

"A hundred dollars isn't going to save me. It's—it's my only chance to win it back." He hesitated. "I was wondering, Phil, if—well, if you could let me have some money."

"How much?"

"Whatever you've got. Phil. I'll pay it back——"

"If you win, Paul!" Bokker frowned. "I owe you for your horse——"

"You lost the bay?" cried Shay. "I paid three hundred dollars for that horse."

"That much?" Bokker winced. "I haven't got three hundred dollars, Paul. I've taken in some money this past week but I've spent money. I put some to Pierson's bail."

"What have you got?"

"Not more than eighty or ninety."

Shay groaned. "That's no money!"

Bokker looked toward the poker game. "It's enough to get into the game, isn't it?"

"You, Phil?"

Bokker nodded.

"It's a stiff game!"

Bokker shrugged. "As you said, eighty or ninety dollars isn't any money. I might as well lose it."

"All right, come ahead!"

They returned to the poker game. Shay announced, "Phil Bokker wants to sit in."

Bokker got a chair from an adjoining table and room was made for him.

"Well, well," exclaimed the mayor. "Two lawyers. Is that legal?" He chuckled at his own joke.

Huntley glowered across the table at Bokker. "Didn't think poker was your game?"

"I've played my share."

"Well, let's see some of your Eastern money," the prosecutor went on. "I know you haven't made enough in Pawnee City to sit in this game."

Bokker reached into his pocket and brought out a handful of crumpled bills and some coins. "I'll start with this." Actually it was all the money he had. He began straightening out the bills, while one of the professional gamblers shuffled smoothly and dealt the cards. "Draw poker," he said, "jacks or better."

"A good game," Bokker observed.

"It hasn't been for me," offered Shay.

"You've had a long streak, Paul," said the mayor. "You were into my store yesterday—a couple of feet, anyway."

"You've got it all back now—and more."

"I usually do get it, in the long run," Longtree said calmly. "I been in business here for quite a spell—and nobody's won my store from me yet."

"I'm going to try!" promised Shay.

Bokker looked at his hand. He had a pair of queens, an ace and two small cards. "I pass," he said.

The second gambler shrugged and indicated that he would pass. The mayor exclaimed, "Not me, I open. Let's see, twenty—no, make it ten. Don't want to scare out the counselor. Not yet."

"If you won't make it twenty, I will," retorted Shay.

Huntley shot an angry look at Shay, but threw twenty dollars into the pot. The gambler-dealer quietly slid in a twenty-dollar gold piece. Bokker studied his cards. "Well, let's see how they run." He put in twenty dollars.

The gambler at Bokker's left threw in his cards.

"And twenty back to you!" cried the mayor.

A slight twitch of Shay's mouth indicated his nervousness. He merely called.

"Stupid playing," growled Huntley. He threw in his cards.

The dealer put in twenty dollars, and Bokker, hesitating, finally put in twenty dollars more.

"Cards?" asked the dealer.

Bokker had already risked almost half of his stake. He was faced with a difficult decision. He didn't know the game of any of the other players, except possibly that of Paul Shay. He could play it safe and delay things—or he could gamble on a bold move.

"One card," he said.

He kept the queens the ace and a nine. It wasn't good playing, but he reasoned that the others knew no more about the way he played than he knew about their game.

"Three," said the mayor.

"You raised me back with one pair?" exclaimed Shay.

"Why not? When you're lucky you draw, when you're not, you don't."

Shay counted out twenty dollars. "I'll take one," Shay said, annoyed.

"Two for the dealer," said the gambler.

"I connected," chortled the mayor. He counted out fifty dollars. "And it costs you fifty."

Shay studied his cards, swallowed hard and suddenly threw in his hand.

"Beats my two small pair."

The dealer threw in his cards, Bokker looked at his new card, saw that it was a nine, thus giving him two pairs, queens and nines. He counted his money. "Four dollars short, for a moment."

The mayor winced. "I didn't connect. All I've got are my openers, jacks—like I said." He chuckled. "Didn't believe that, did you?"

Bokker revealed his queens and nines.

The mayor shook his head. "So you weren't lying."

"I had tens and sixes," said Shay.

"You should have bet like you got them," the mayor exclaimed. "I don't think the counselor would have stayed with one more raise."

Bokker gathered in the money and scooped up the cards. He shuffled and dealt. He looked at his hand. It was a complete bust. "I'm out," he announced.

It was the mayor who opened again, and again Shay raised him. Huntley stayed, as did the two professionals.

"Two," said the mayor, when it came his turn.

Shay again drew one card and Bokker, watching, saw his face twitch once more. Shay had not improved his hand.

"This time," announced the mayor, "the pikers can drop out. A hundred dollars."

"I'm out of money," Shay said. "Is my credit good?"

"This is a cash game," Huntley snapped.

The mayor held up his hand. "Tut-tut, Mike. We know Paul. All he's got to do is write out a check on the bank."

Huntley opened his mouth to protest further, but closed it and shrugged. The gambler on Bokker's right dropped out, but the one on his left called and raised it fifty dollars. He was promptly re-raised two hundred by the mayor.

"I call," said Shay tautly. "I'm three-fifty light."

"Sorry, gentlemen," announced the gambler. "I've got to go once more. A hundred to you, Mr. Longtree."

"And two hundred back to you!"

Huntley swore angrily and tossed in his cards. But Shay called. "I'm six-fifty short."

The gambler said, "I bet as much as I could on a small full house."

"Hey!" cried the mayor. "That's twice in a row my bluff got called." He exposed a pair of aces. "That's all there is."

Shay exposed a nine-high straight.

"I owe you six-fifty, Miller."

"A check will be all right."

"I don't believe I've got one with me."

"The bartender has."

Shay pushed back his chair. "All right," he snapped, "but deal me out a couple of hands. I need a drink."

He crossed to the bar.

TWENTY-TWO

Fletcher Trow brought forward his chair. "I'll play a hand or two."

"New blood!" cried the mayor. "I'd like to get some of your money, Fletcher."

"You'll work for it," Trow promised laconically.

Trow promptly won the first pot, a fairly small one, the mayor not even getting a pair, although he stayed for the draw and even tried a raise of twenty dollars.

Shay came back then. He tossed a slip of paper to the gambler, Miller. "I made it out for a thousand."

Miller counted out three hundred and fifty dollars. "There's your change, Mr. Shay."

Shay seated himself. It was the mayor's deal and he warned the other players. "I'm last this time, watch out."

Shay looked at his cards and passed. Huntley scowled at his own hand, hesitated, then opened the pot for five dollars. The gambler on Bokker's right merely called, but Fletcher Trow, next, raised it ten dollars. Bokker squeezed his cards and came up with three tens. He put fifteen dollars into the pot. Miller, the gambler, threw in his hand.

"I warned you," the mayor said. "I raise fifty dollars, just to get rid of the cheapskates."

"I'll see you," said Shay, "and raise your fifty."

"What kind of game is this?" cried Huntley angrily.

"A freeze-out," retorted the mayor. "If you haven't got the guts, Mike, drop out."

"I'm staying!"

The gambler stayed and Trow merely called. Bokker put in the extra fifty dollars.

"Cards?"

"Two," said Shay.

"Oh-ho!" exclaimed the mayor. "Holding an ace for a kicker."

"Maybe," replied Shay grimly.

Huntley drew only one card and scowled as he looked at it.

Bokker felt certain that he had only two pairs, respectable pairs, however. The gambler took two cards. Fletcher Trow said laconically, "I like the ones I've got."

"Lady Luck's gone over to the marshal," observed the mayor.

Bokker drew two cards. One was a ten. He had four tens now.

"And three cards for the dealer," the mayor said cheerfully.

Huntley exclaimed, "You raised with a pair?"

"I've done it before—and I've connected," retorted the mayor. "Like now. Go ahead, you opened. Make your bet and whatever it is, I'll raise it."

"Fifty dollars," said Huntley, not too happy.

"I'll call to the pat hand," said the gambler.

"The pat hand raises a hundred," Fletcher Trow said.

Bokker, certain that the mayor would raise, counted out a hundred and put it into the pot.

Longtree, according to his promise, said, "And two hundred more. That'll get rid of the boys."

"I'm calling," said Shay, "and I'll raise it a hundred. That makes me one-fifteen short."

Huntley, disgusted, threw in his hand. "If everybody's going to be short in the pot, I might as well drop out."

Shay gave him a hard look. The gambler to Bokker's right said, "Something tells me that three nines isn't any good this time." He tossed his cards into the discard.

"I'm sorry," Fletcher Trow said, "but I've still got the best hand. I raise it three hundred."

Bokker had gone into the pot with around three hundred dollars. He had thirty-five dollars left to call Longtree's two hundred dollars. Trow's three hundred raise would make him short over four hundred and sixty-five dollars. But Shay had led the way. He had been short in the previous hand and was again short.

"I'm light for the moment," Bokker said, "for sixty-five."

"Another!" cried Huntley.

"I'm out," Mayor Longtree said suddenly, and threw in his hand.

"That leaves three of us," observed Fletcher Trow. "Paul?"

"I call the three hundred," Shay said. He looked across at Bokker, "and I raise you back, Fletch—three hundred."

"Put in your check," Trow said. He turned to Bokker.

Bokker had no money in the bank. But neither, he knew,

did Paul Shay. Shay had company money, but he had already dipped into it deeply. The bank probably wouldn't honor his check unless there was an invoice from the railroad company to cover a shipment of cattle.

Bokker said, "I'll make out my check after this hand—if I lose."

Trow exclaimed testily, "What kind of a game is this?"

"Freeze-out, the mayor said," Bokker retorted. "How much are you light, Paul?"

"Seven fifteen," Shay said angrily. "Are you calling?"

"I'm calling," said Trow, "with cash." He put out the money.

"I call," Bokker said, "short. Seven hundred and sixty-five."

"What's the use?" Trow snapped. "I could raise again, but nobody except myself is putting up the cash. I've got a queen-high spade flush."

"Beats three kings," cried Shay.

"Four tens," Bokker announced, showing the cards.

Trow, beside him, inhaled sharply. "You win, Bokker." He sat still for a moment, then pushed back his chair. "I guess I've had enough."

The gambler on the right stood up. "I'm tired; I need sleep."

"I'm not sleepy," the mayor said thoughtfully, "but the game's got out of hand."

"Mayor," Shay said carefully, "can you cash a check for me?"

Longtree hesitated. "You've lost quite a lot, Paul. I've already got two of your checks for fifteen hundred."

"I've got the money. The check'll be good."

Longtree frowned. "How much?"

"A thousand—well, five hundred."

"You're short seven-fifteen in this pot," Bokker reminded.

"I'll give you a separate check, Phil. I'd like to play a little while longer."

"I'm through," Huntley said, getting up.

"How about you, Miller?" the mayor asked the gambler.

"If there's still cash in the game I'll play."

"There's cash," Shay said testily. He indicated the considerable amount in front of Bokker. "Win that and call it a night. You've already won a couple thousand from me. I'd like a chance to win some of it back."

"All right, Mr. Shay, I'll play."

The mayor had counted out five hundred dollars for Shay. "We'll play four-handed. A good game. But"—he paused—"no more checks, huh?"

"I'll quit if I lose this five hundred," Shay said angrily.

Bokker looked at the clock over the bar. It was after four o'clock. If he could keep the game going until six o'clock he was all right.

A half dozen of the spectators left as Huntley and Trow also went out. Seven or eight men remained, however, to watch the four-handed game.

The game became a more cautious one. Shay, with only five hundred, played carefully. Bokker was cautious, as was the gambler, Miller. The mayor tried once or twice to force a pot, but when he found that he could not make it stick, settled down to a hard, good game of poker.

Bokker's luck held. He drew well and won two pots in a row, lost three, then won three in a row. Shay's money dwindled. Bokker found himself with close to two thousand dollars when Shay was down to a little over a hundred.

The mayor dropped out of a hand after the draw, as did Miller. Bokker bet fifty dollars. Shay, who had drawn only two cards to Bokker's three card draw, called the fifty and counted out another fifty.

"Up fifty!"

Bokker looked at his cards. He had stayed with a pair of kings and had drawn another. He was sure he had Shay beaten, but if Shay went broke he would probably quit.

Bokker tossed his cards into the discard. "You win!"

Shay showed surprise, but gleefully raked in the pot. "I quess Lady Luck's turning."

At five o'clock Shay's luck really did turn. He won four pots in a row, two of them sizable. He had twelve or thirteen hundred dollars before him.

Then Miller said, "I'm beat. I'll play one more round."

The mayor yawned. "I think I'd better get a little sleep, too." He looked at Bokker. "Don't see how you do it, with that head."

"It doesn't bother," Bokker replied.

Shay, faced with only four more hands of poker, decided to bull the game again. He opened for twenty dollars and when he was raised twenty by Longtree, came back with a raise of a hundred. Everyone, surprisingly, stayed. Shay drew a single card, Bokker three, the mayor two and Miller one.

Shay bet two hundred dollars. Bokker, with only a pair of eights, dropped out. The mayor merely called, but Miller raised Shay a hundred and was promptly re-raised three hundred. Longtree threw in his cards and the gambler called. He had a king-high straight, beating out Shay, who had drawn one card to a low straight and had connected.

The hand had taken half of Shay's money.

Bokker did not stay at all in the next hand, nor did Longtree. Miller opened for twenty dollars, was raised a hundred and merely called. He checked to Shay after the draw and the latter bet three hundred. Miller called him—and won with a pair of aces.

There was no fourth hand. Miller won the third and Shay wound up without a cent on the table. He got up heavily.

"An expensive night," he said, looking murderously at the gambler, Miller, who had been the big winner.

Bokker counted his money. He was almost eighteen hundred dollars ahead. Shay had not made out the check to him for seven hundred and fifteen dollars, but Bokker did not remind him of it.

The bartender came over. "Well, gentlemen, how about a last drink before I close up?"

It was twenty minutes after five. It would still be dark outside.

Bokker, about to put away his winnings, suddenly looked at the bartender. "This is more money than I'm used to having—and I haven't even got a gun."

"Nobody'll rob you—not in Pawnee City," said the mayor.

"I'd feel better with a gun." Bokker looked at the bartender. "Do you happen to have a Navy gun I could buy?"

"No, but I'll lend you one," the bartender said, "if it'll make you feel better."

Bokker peeled off two twenties from his roll of bills. "I'll feel better buying it and, here—the drinks for everyone and keep the change."

The last spectators of the poker game swarmed to the bar. The bartender served the drinks and brought out a somewhat rusted Navy Colt. But Bokker, examining it, saw that the caps on the nipples were good and that each chamber in the cylinder was loaded. He thrust the gun under the waistband of his trousers.

"Good night," he said to the group at large.

"I'll walk with you, Phil," said Shay. "I need the air."

Shay's usually ebullient spirits had seeped out of him. Bokker had never seen him so discouraged. They left the saloon and started down the wooden sidewalk toward Bokker's place. Shay walked slumped, listless, but Bokker beside him was taut, strained.

In the east the sky was becoming gray.

Shay said, "I'm through, Phil. I wrote out checks for three thousand dollars that I can't meet, and I haven't got a dollar in my pockets. If it wasn't for——"

"Ruth?"

"Ruth?" repeated Shay. Then he exclaimed, "You think Ruth and I are——?"

"Aren't you?"

Shay was silent a moment. Then he said, "She's a good girl, Phil. If I wasn't the kind of man I am . . ." He laughed hollowly. "She needs a man like you, Phil."

"Things between us have reached a low point," Bokker said cautiously.

"Don't be too sure. You never can tell about a woman." They had reached Bokker's office. Shay suddenly gripped Bokker's arm. "Phil, that money you won—eighteen hundred. I could pay off the mayor—well, almost. I can work it out—give me the eighteen hundred."

Bokker was taken aback. "I'll be damned!"

"It's just a loan, Phil," Shay went on. "I'll give you an I.O.U. It's just until I can buy another herd. Time's all I need. A herd's coming in day after tomorrow. I'll buy it——"

"You can't make that much profit on a herd."

"Yes, I can. I—I made thirty-two hundred on the first one I bought. I paid twenty-one dollars a steer and had the railroad agent make out the invoice for twenty-five. I'll do it again. I'll work out a deal and pay you off."

"Are you serious, Paul?" exclaimed Bokker. "You ought to know by now that I wouldn't be a party to any deal such as that."

"Then never mind how I make the money. Just lend me the eighteen hundred——"

"No," Bokker said firmly. "Money doesn't mean anything to you. You'll only get in a game again and——"

"You won that money!" snarled Shay angrily. "You didn't earn it. You won't be any poorer than you were a few hours ago."

"I've been poor most of my life," Bokker snapped. "Eight-

een hundred dollars is a lot of money. All right, I won it in a poker game, but it's still eighteen hundred dollars."

"You won't help me out, then?"

"I don't think I owe you anything, Paul."

"Ah, hell!" snarled Shay, and whirled away. He clomped angrily down the wooden sidewalk.

And now Bokker was faced with it. Was the man still in his bedroom? Was he waiting with drawn gun?

Bokker drew the Navy gun he had bought from the bartender. He turned the knob of his front door, swung the door inward. He called into the dark interior.

"I'm coming in!"

There was no reply from inside. Bokker waited a moment, then entered. He stood inside the door, gun pointed at the door leading to the bedroom.

He sniffed the air. There was an odor of stale cigar smoke in the room. He heard no sound, however.

He called once more, "I'm coming in!"

There was still no reply. Bokker took out a match, struck it and then tossed it through the door into the bedroom. He followed instantly.

The room was empty.

The bed was mussed, there were cigar ashes and two cigar butts on the floor, the only mementoes of the man who had waited there for him earlier.

Bokker went to the window, drew the shade, then returned to the outer room and locked the door. He lit a candle in the bedroom and made up a bed on the floor.

TWENTY-THREE

Bokker slept three hours on the floor of his room and awoke stiff and sore in every muscle of his body. Or so it seemed. He got up, stretched and winced as pain lanced through his head. He had almost forgotten the wound in his head. He looked at himself in a tiny mirror over his washstand. He could use a shave, but was not in the mood for it. He washed carefully, then left his office to cross the street to the restaurant.

It was a few minutes to nine when he left the restaurant. He stood outside for a moment, then became aware that Ruth Compton was standing in the open doorway of her shop. He started across the street, but before he reached the far sidewalk, Ruth had gone back into her shop. The door, however, remained open.

Bokker started to pass, then she called from inside, "Phil!"

Surprised, he turned and entered the shop. She came forward, closed the door behind him.

"Paul's left," she said. "He's gone for good."

Bokker exclaimed, "He ran out!"

She nodded. "He was here a half hour ago. He—he told me about the checks that he'd written and he didn't want to wait until the bank opened at nine o'clock."

Bokker shook his head. "He finally used up all his tricks."

"You never really liked him, did you?"

Bokker looked at her sharply. Her tone was listless, containing a trace of—despair, was it?

He said, "You did, though?"

"Yes," she said, "I liked Paul. In spite of his—faults, I guess you'd call them—I liked him. But I—I didn't call you in to talk about him." She stopped.

Bokker waited, expecting her to continue, but she averted her eyes from his and remained silent. He prodded: "Yes?"

"You're not an easy man to talk to!" she burst out. "You—you're always thinking of yourself and you don't see what's in other people."

"We won't get anywhere talking about Paul Shay."

"I'm not talking about Paul!" she cried. "I'm talking about—about me."

He looked at her, puzzled, but she still kept her eyes averted. She turned away from him suddenly, feeling him too close and went behind the low shop counter. Still without looking at him she said, "I'm taking the train this morning."

"Because of the shop?"

"What else is there for me? I can't pay Mrs. Melcher's bills."

"I'll pay them," Bokker said. "I mean, I'll lend you the money. I think you can make a success of the shop."

"No," she said, "I've made up my mind. I'm going home."

"To Raytown?"

"Kansas City, that's where I live."

"I suppose you'll meet Shay there."

Now she looked at him. Angrily, her eyes blazing. "You never stop, do you?"

"I'm sorry," he said stiffly. "We just don't seem able to carry on a normal conversation without getting into a quarrel." He nodded and headed for the door.

"Wait!"

He turned. "Yes?"

"You can't go like this. I—I'm taking the train in an hour. I didn't want to quarrel with you—not now. I—I called you in to tell you something entirely different, but . . . you've made it too difficult."

"Very well, let's try it again," he said gruffly. "And I'll try not to be—difficult."

"Come to Kansas City!" she burst out. "Come with me."

He blinked, astonished and she came toward him, only the counter between them. "This is no place for you, Phil. You've had nothing but trouble. Leave Pawnee City—take the train with me this morning."

Bokker suddenly started around behind the counter, but when she saw him coming she retreated in panic. "No—no, Phil. I—I didn't mean that. . . ."

"What *did* you mean?" he asked ominously.

There was no exit at the far end of the counter. It touched the wall partition. Ruth could retreat no further—and Bokker still advanced.

"No," she whispered. "No," even as he reached for her.

Her body was taut, but it trembled violently and as Bokker pulled her close to him, she became suddenly limp, yielding. A gasp was torn from her lips just before they met his. She responded to his kiss passionately, almost desperately.

But only for a moment. Then she was fighting him again, pushing him back.

"No!" she cried. "I won't—let it—happen."

"You can't love him," he cried. "You don't!"

"*I don't—love you!*"

He started to reach for her again, but saw her shrink and cringe from him. The hopelessness of—her character—swept through him.

"All right," he said dully. "I can't fight you. Not any more. Go to him. Take the train and go to your Paul Shay. . . ."

He turned away. The aisle behind the counter was narrow. A magazine, lying on a shelf below the counter stuck out an inch or two. Bokker's leg brushed against it and knocked the magazine to the floor. He stepped over it, but even as he did, his eyes went down to the floor.

Gasping, he stooped and snatched up the magazine.

It was a copy of *Fred Cowan's Illustrated Weekly*—a battered dog-eared copy. His copy, the one that had disappeared from his office. He had handled it so many times his fingers had soiled and smudged it so that it was as recognizable to him as—as his own face in a mirror.

"Where did you get this?" he cried.

She saw the magazine in his hands then, and shock hit her. "Give me that," she screamed. "Give me that!"

She flew at him, tried to tear the magazine from his hands. But it was too late. The magazine had been turned to the page containing the Lawrence sketch. It was so familiar to him that his eyes immediately caught something in the illustration that was out of place. Something different . . . something that had been added to the picture.

A penciled drawing of a head in the upper right corner. A rough sketch, apparently made idly and unfinished, but recognizable.

The face of Phil Bokker. A second face of Phil Bokker.

The significance of the sketch sent a shudder through Bokker.

"Paul—*Paul drew this!*" he gasped.

The agony on her face told him that he had the answer at last. After so very long, he knew.

"Yes," he half whispered. "Paul Shay." The past hurtled through his mind. "Yes, it could have been Paul. He came into the hospital in August, after the raid . . . he was probably wounded in the retreat. And he left—he left in time to rejoin Quantrell before Baxter Springs!" The audacity of the man caused grudging admiration to filter through Bokker. "Only Paul Shay could have had the gall to go to St. Louis—to a Union hospital—after what he did at Lawrence."

"Go!" she said poignantly. "All right, go. You know, so go . . . go!"

He brought it down to the present. "No wonder we always fought. He was always between us. You loved him and you had to shield him—you had to protect him. Paul Shay, the blackest murderer who ever lived."

"He's my brother!" she screamed at Bokker. "He's my brother! What else could I do?"

"Your brother!" cried Bokker, almost reeling.

"It was war—and even if it hadn't been, he was my brother. I didn't want to tell you. I wanted to get you out of Pawnee City before he came back. He's desperate. He's going to kill you and I—I don't want him to do that."

"He's coming back?" Bokker asked harshly. "When?"

"This morning—at noon. I wanted to get you on the train before—before——" She stopped, her eyes fixed on Bokker in shock. "I shouldn't have told you," she whispered. "I can see that awful look in your eyes again."

"*Why is he coming back?* Why did he leave before nine o'clock in the morning and why is he coming back at noon? Why doesn't he stay away?"

"I—don't—know."

"You're lying again. It's been nothing but lies—lies—lies—right from the moment I met you. Everything's been a lie. Nothing matters to you except—your brother!"

He whirled and clenching the magazine in his hand, strode out from behind the counter and out of the shop.

Seething inwardly, he stamped down the sidewalk. He was past his office before he realized that he had passed it. Angrily, he whirled back. And then his eyes flickered across the street. Fletcher Trow was standing in the doorway of his office.

Bokker cut across the dusty street.

Trow watched him as he came up. He leaned against the

door jamb, almost aloof, impersonal, but Bokker knew that Trow was aware of the magazine in his hands seconds before he reached him.

"So it was Shay!" Bokker snarled. "It was Shay—and you knew it all the time."

"I saw you come from her shop," Trow said tonelessly. "I guess she told you. That's the trouble with a woman—she's got to fall in love with a man. Well, so you know. Only he's gone now, so it isn't going to do you much good." Trow was speaking deliberately, quietly, but he was choosing his words. "Of course you can start after him. Keep on looking for him and you may catch up to him sometime—maybe. . . ."

"It's over," Bokker said, "and you know it. You know Paul's coming back. You've been in with him all the time. You were playing with him last night in the poker game. You've been with him all the way, Trow. Yes—you brought Pierson and Charr Mechem here. The whole thing was a scheme of yours and Paul's. Pierson was to lead me to Acorn, where I could be taken care of without any trouble to you—or Paul Shay. But it misfired and you staked out Mechem—or Pierson—in my bedroom."

"That's quite an imagination you've got," Fletcher Trow said quietly. "But I think I've heard about enough from you, Bokker. Enough to last me—quite a spell. . . ." He turned and walked into his office.

Bokker did not follow him. He walked down the wooden sidewalk. To the bank.

He entered and went through the low swinging door into the private compartment of Joshua Chandler, the cashier and president of the bank.

Chandler looked up at him. "Mr. Bokker," he exclaimed, noting the bandage about Bokker's head. "What happened to you?"

"Somebody tried to kill me, that's all. Mr. Chandler, your bank's going to be held up this morning!"

Chandler stared at him. "What . . . do you mean?"

"Paul Shay's going to hold it up . . ."

"But Shay's skipped town. He gave some checks to Steve Longtree last night—in a poker game. He has no money here, and I guess he couldn't face the music. Steve was in a half hour ago——"

"He's coming back!" Bokker said. "He's coming back at noon. He's going to take every dollar you've got in this bank."

"That's fantastic!" breathed Josh Chandler. "Why—why should he turn outlaw, a respectable cattle buyer?"

"A respectable cattle buyer! Paul Shay's a former guerrilla —a murderer——"

"Your friend, you're talking about your friend!" cried the banker.

"He was never my friend. He used me—he know that I was after him and he worked on me—he worked on me every minute. To throw me off the track. He's a killer. He couldn't keep up the pretense any more so now he's coming out into the open. He's going to do what others of his old crowd are doing . . . he's going to rob a bank. Your bank, Mr. Chandler . . ."

"No, he won't!" cried Chandler. "I'm ready for him. I'll take no chances. Even if you're wrong about Shay, I'll take no chances. I'll have Fletch Trow——"

"Trow! Trow's in with him. Don't you understand? They're old friends—they rode together with Quantrell——"

"Oh, I've heard those stories about Trow. I don't know if they're true or not, but it doesn't make any difference. As far as Pawnee City is concerned Fletcher Trow's the best marshal we've ever had. What he did during the war—well, he's lived all that down."

Bokker stared at the banker in astonishment. "You still won't believe, will you? That those men were not guerrilla soldiers—they were *not* Confederates, fighting for a cause. They were bushwhackers—thieves, murderers!"

"Oh, come now, Bokker. . . ."

"Jesse James rode with Quantrell! So did Cole Younger and all his brothers—and Frank James and the rest of the Missouri boys. Were they fighting a war? Are they *still* fighting a war? Jesse James was a boy when Fletcher Trow was one of Quantrell's captains. Fletcher Trow gave orders to Jesse James and his crowd. They rode together and they murdered together. And they're *still* together. They're together today. Not just Trow and Shay, Mr. Chandler . . . a man named Pierson's here; he was one of Quantrell's men. So was Charr Mechem. He's here, too. They came yesterday. . . . *Why*—*why*, Mr. Chandler?"

"I don't know," Chandler said worriedly. "I guess—I don't understand things. I—I've heard stories about you, Mr. Bokker. Oh, it's been whispered, but nevertheless, more than

one person's told me. They—they say you rode with Quantrell, too."

Bokker had the magazine in his hands, the magazine with the evidence *against* him. He could show it to Joshua Chandler and it would do only one thing—it would make Chandler even surer that it was Bokker who was in the wrong.

He said, "I can't do any more, Mr. Chandler. I've said my piece. Don't trust Fletcher Trow—or anyone . . . !"

He turned and walked out of the banker's office.

TWENTY-FOUR

Bokker stood across the street from Ruth Compton's millinery shop. He had been standing there an hour. She had not come out. The train came into Pawnee City, waited a half hour and took on its passengers and freight for the East. It went off at eleven o'clock and Ruth Compton was not on it.

Fletcher Trow, the Marshal of Pawnee City, passed Bokker, but did not look at him. Bokker saw him go into the bank. He saw Steve Longtree, the mayor of Pawnee City, go into the bank. Mike Huntley, the prosecuting attorney, had apparently also been sent for, for he too went into the bank.

At eleven thirty Trow came out of the bank. Again he passed Bokker. At a quarter to twelve, Tom Chaffee, carrying a shotgun and wearing two Navy guns, rode past Bokker and dismounted near the bank. He took up a position a few feet from the entrance. On guard. Against bank robbers? Or, for them!

Five minutes later, Fletcher Trow, wearing only his customary single revolver, rode past. He tied his horse to the hitchrail in front of the bank, but he did not go toward his deputy. He stood carelessly on the other side of the bank door.

The mayor and the prosecuting attorney were still in the bank.

A minute passed . . . two . . .

They came. They came from the north. They crossed the railroad tracks, rode down toward the bank at an easy canter.

There were three. Paul Shay, MacDonald Pierson and Charr Mechem.

Looking neither to the right nor the left, they rode up to the bank and dismounted. Tying their horses to the hitchrail, they headed for the door of the bank. Before they reached it, Fletcher Trow turned and went into the bank.

The former bushwhackers were only feet behind Trow.

Tom Chaffee remained outside the bank.

Bokker was a hundred feet away. He took a last look at

the millinery shop across the street, drew a deep breath and started for the bank.

A gun banged inside the bank!

Bokker's gun was in his hand. He started running toward the bank. And even as he ran he saw Tom Chaffee move forward to block the door.

"That's it, Bokker!" he called, when Bokker was still fifty feet away.

Another gun went off inside the bank. Glass crashed simultaneously.

The shotgun in Chaffee's hands was pointed at Bokker.

At the moment of the crashing of the glass, Bokker threw himself sidewards. The shotgun boomed and a tiny pellet stung his face. But he had missed the main part of the blast. Then his Navy gun barked.

Chaffee staggered. His convulsing finger pressed the trigger of the shotgun once more. The charge went across the street, breaking glass in a store.

Chaffee reached for one of his Navy guns. Bokker shot him again coldly, savagely.

There were men on the streets; they already knew what was happening, were converging forward upon the bank. Men were coming out of stores.

Chaffee went down and Bokker continued forward. The door of the bank burst open and MacDonald Pierson came leaping out. A wild cry rose from his throat.

The old guerrilla yell, the yell of the old Quantrell riders that had turned cold the blood of so many people in recent years.

Pierson did not even see Bokker. He rushed for the horses. He fired indiscriminately at approaching Pawnee City men. They were firing back, of course. And inside the bank, a gun went off again and again.

Fletcher Trow came backing out of the bank. Crowding him was Charr Mechem—Charr Mechem, his face already bloody.

Paul Shay was the last man out. His left arm hung limp at his side, but his right hand held a revolver that he was firing into the bank.

Trow crossed swiftly to his horse. Mechem turned—and met a bullet from someone in the middle of the street. He cried out and pitched to his face.

Paul Shay whirled. His eyes, as if magnetized, went to Bokker's. His face was distorted.

"All right, Phil!" he screamed. "You *had to have it!*"

A bullet—not from Bokker's gun—struck him in the pit of the stomach. In agony, Shay bent forward. But he fought the death that was sweeping over him. He fought it and brought up his revolver . . . brought it up, to point at Bokker.

Even then Bokker held his fire. Something . . . something . . . would not let him kill Shay. Was it Ruth? . . . Was it because Shay was already dying?

Shay's gun thundered. The bullet, fired by Shay's dying hand, struck Bokker with savage force, turned him half around. A bullet, fired by Trow, already in the saddle, grazed Bokker. It would have killed him if Shay's bullet had not turned him around.

Bokker fired then. His bullet hit Shay, but it was not necessary. Shay was already going down. So was Bokker.

He fell to his knees, tried to get up again and couldn't. He did raise his gun . . . and through filming eyes saw MacDonald Pierson, the wild young bushwhacker who had pretended so admirably only the day before to be a craven coward. Pierson was on his horse. He could have gotten away, galloped down the street. But he had turned toward the scene of the carnage. He rode at Bokker.

Bokker squeezed the trigger and could no longer see Pierson.

There was more firing, more savage yelling and cursing and shooting. Mayor Longtree, blood pouring from a bad wound in his head, came out of the bank, a gun in his hand. It was his bullet that cut down the last man, Fletcher Trow —the best marshal that Pawnee City had ever had.

Boots swirled and pounded all around Bokker. He did not see them, heard only a roaring in his head, a pounding of his wildly stimulated heart. A hand touched him and a rough voice said, "He's got it—bad!"

Then another voice cried out, "Phil . . . Phil . . . oh, Phil!"

She was on her knees beside him. Her arms were about him, hugging him, holding him tight.

Bokker forced out words. "It's all right, Ruth, it's all right . . ."

It was all right.

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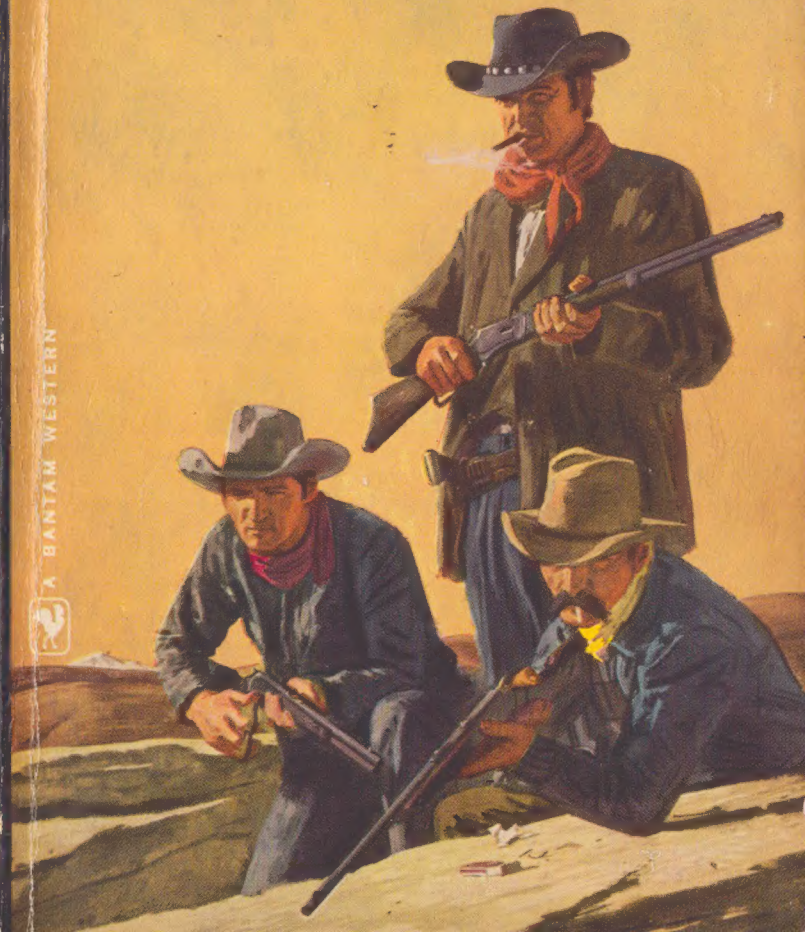

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